

**The Dhamma Path Through Relationship:
Experience of Vipassana Meditators with Respect
to Intimate Relationship**

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Abstract

Vipassana meditation is a practice that can aid in the development of self-awareness; relationship research points to the positive contribution of self-awareness to relationship. This study was carried out as a phenomenological investigation of committed relationship as experienced by Vipassana meditators. Buddhist teaching, meditation technique, and relationship theory were the lenses through which the study was viewed.

Participants defined relationship as a path of self-discovery and love as a developmental continuum leading from neediness to selflessness. They also reported an increased ability to deal positively with conflict, a deeper sense of compassion and friendship with their partners, and an overall positive change between relationships experienced before and after meditation practice was begun.

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As I hope is made evident in the work to follow, I believe that no project and indeed no human activity can be carried out in complete independence or disconnection from other people or from the phenomenal world.

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Introduction

Happy Families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. (Tolstoy, 1981, as cited in Solomon, 1994)

Is there a commonality in what can make a relationship something of beauty and fulfillment, and are there principles to follow that can lead a person toward happiness in relationship? Is there a tool, a practice, a path that will lead surely to

a sense of greater joy and intimate communion with a partner? Common sense seems to answer "Yes" to these questions, and it is the thesis of this study that the practice of Vipassana meditation is just such a path, leading to greater understanding of the principles of joy and peace.

However, this can seem a somewhat grandiose statement without further explanation. There is, after all, a great deal of uncertainty as to what exactly these principles are, and very little agreement about what is needed to find them. Modern music, cinema, television and printed media all carry hosts of messages pointing to the ideal of romantic love and its power to heal all. Psychologists and authors on the topic of relationship suggest countless methods, principles, and ideals for better relationships, for better sex, or for finding happiness with a partner. Philosophers have argued for centuries over the meaning and significance of love, and all of the great religions have a point of view on the subject. Within this great barrage of messages, how can one person find a truth to hold onto, and how can one person choose a path that will actually bring what is sought? What is the commonality within the cacophony, and how is the truth winnowed from the chaff?

These are not questions that can be answered by one person with the intention of answering for all. These are questions that knock upon the door of the existential truths of life, asking "why am I here?" "What is my place, my purpose, my meaning – and if I am given choice, what way will I choose?" These are questions that sink deep into the foundations of what we believe and, in the words of Kahlil Gibran (1991) speaking of love, "...descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth ." (p. 11)

It is difficult to reach the roots of a great tree by climbing into its branches, and it is even more difficult to find a path to joyful relationship by searching only outside of one's self. Questioning in this study was undertaken with the assumption that there cannot truly be a separation between the action of perceiving (noesis), and what is perceived (noema). The plane of contact between noesis and noema is the ground on which the experience of "...being-in-the-world" (Valle, 1978, p. 8) is built, and it is into this experience that one must go to bring ideas into contact with experience.

The tool, and practice, that was chosen for reaching this place of lived-in-the-world experience is that of Vipassana meditation. Through the deep examination of one's own inner experience in meditation, it is possible to explore the field of contact between the outside world and the inside world at ever greater levels of detail and subtlety. Reaching deep within one's own experience through the practice of Vipassana brings awareness to levels at which it is possible to observe the interplay of noesis and noema in the present moment, and to gain greater perspective of the moment by moment truth of that-that-is, as opposed to that-that-is-desired.

Vipassana meditation, then, is a practice that can take an interested observer down into the very roots of her or his life and direct awareness to the subtle interplays between experience of internal (inside the body), and external (outside the body) realities. Though enhancing relationship is not a goal of the practice of Vipassana, it is my belief that practice in this style of meditation will indeed enhance intimate relationships simply as a by-product of the practice. Like joy, happiness in relationship is not something to be searched for directly, but instead is something that arrives unexpectedly when one is looking with deep commitment for something else.

The problem, of course, is in finding what this something else could be. To what must one commit if it is not to relationship itself? Moreover, even if an ideal is found to which to commit, how does one bridge the gap between the philosophy and the reality of day to day living?

Vipassana meditation seems to promote both a philosophy in which harmonious relationship is revered and a practical method for learning to bring this philosophy bit by bit into deeper practice in daily life. Studying the experience of committed meditators can therefore shed light on what benefits can be found in the practice of Vipassana, and can help to point out how this practice can be beneficial for those who wish to find more depth and lasting joy in their committed partnerships.

Though Vipassana is, in itself, a reasonably simple practice, it is necessary to have an understanding both of the theory behind the practice of meditation and of the philosophy of Buddhism in order to understand the experience of the study participants. It is also necessary to gain some insight into the vast body of literature that has been written about relationship in order to have a grounding in the thinking of other relationship researchers and philosophers. This study therefore begins by defining the field of inquiry and investigating the literature of relationship, meditation, and Buddhism.

Literature review

Narrowing the field in a study is both a necessary and a hazardous occupation. On the one hand, it is essential that the vastness of possibilities be limited to a manageable size, and that there be a sense of focus. On the other hand, the act of defining the field of inquiry introduces limitation and bias as the boundaries are defined and the study area is drawn out.

This study can be seen as a stool, supported by three legs arranged in a triangle. On one vertex of the triangle is the philosophy of Buddhism, on another the

practice of Vipassana meditation, and on the other are theories and ideals of intimate relationship. These three legs are, together, the philosophical and practical base on which the study rests, and within their triangle is defined the field of this inquiry.

Buddhism

...how are we to live peacefully? How are we to remain harmonious within, and maintain peace and harmony around us... (Goenka, 1992)

Buddhism is frequently thought of as a religion, and is followed as such in many instances. However, it differs from most religions in that the founder of Buddhism does not claim to be anything but a man. Moreover, Buddhism does not claim to be a faith that must be believed, nor does it provide edicts and rules that are to be followed out of devotion to a particular set of teachings(1). Buddhism, above all else, is a *practice*. Rather than exhorting his followers to believe, the Buddha taught them to practice and to realize truth for themselves when it came upon them. Questions of how to live peacefully and harmoniously may thus be gradually answered in the life of a practitioner of Buddhism – not by belief or subscription to rules, but by practice and gradual realization of personal reality.

Buddhism is a complete cosmology with teachings that address many levels of existence in this world as well as in other planes and levels that are not recognized by Western thought. Of interest here, however, are the Buddhist teachings that address human behavior in this world. With respect to this, the path that is Buddhism can be reduced to four words in the Pali language: Dukkha, Samudaya, Nirodha and Magga. Collectively, these four concepts are known as the four Noble Truths, and they are the keystones of "Dhamma" - Buddhist practice.

Dukkha

Dukkha, the first Noble Truth, is usually translated as "suffering" but actually means much more than this. In Buddhist thought, one must look realistically at things as they truly are and if one looks very truthfully at life it becomes clear that "Life is challenging. For *everyone*. Our physical bodies, our relationships – all of our life circumstances – are fragile and subject to change. We are always accommodating" (Boorstein, 2002, p. 39).

The first Noble Truth is often thought to be a pessimistic or negative viewpoint of reality, and Buddhism is sometimes considered to be a pessimistic religion as a result of this misunderstanding. The reality is that Buddhism is not particularly pessimistic, nor particularly optimistic. Buddhist thought is pragmatic and realistic, attempting to look at life as it *really is* rather than through lenses that distort it into visions of *what we wish it were*. Looking beneath all of the efforts to

be entertained, to achieve power or success, or fame or wealth, a moment of realism is generally enough to see that under the gloss and cover of all of this surface activity, the reality of death and uncertainty is always present. We do not know what will happen tomorrow, or even in the next instant. We cannot keep our moments of happiness and pleasure, and we cannot avoid our times of pain, loss, and sorrow. All that we think we own and all that we hold will one day certainly be lost, and death will one day take us all. Change is a certainty, loss is a certainty, death is a certainty. This is the reality taught by the first Noble Truth. Life itself, by its very nature, is suffering.

Though the first Noble Truth does indeed sound rather pessimistic, it must be remembered that it is only one quarter of the teaching, and that it only sets the stage for the other three Noble Truths. Buddhism teaches not only that there is suffering in the world, but also that there is a way to move beyond this suffering. "Even the stars are born and die, but beyond the transiency of the world there is an eternal that each of us can comprehend" (Fleischman, 1990, p. 15). Buddhism is also practical, teaching that "Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it" (Rahula, 1974, p. 28) and "...joy (piti) is one of ...the essential qualities to be cultivated for the realization of Nirvana" (Rahula, 1974, p. 28).

Samudaya

The second Noble Truth, Samudaya, is the Truth that explains why it is that Dukkha exists. In the simplest of terms, "The cause of suffering is the mind's struggle in response to challenge" (Boorstein, 2002, p. 39). On a more technical level, the Buddha explains the arising of Dukkha through the cycle of conditioned arising. In this cycle, a sense organ (such as the eye) comes into contact with a sense object (such as an apple). The eye transmits an image of the apple to the brain, where the image is processed and recognized – "This is an apple". Once recognition has taken place, the brain proceeds to make a judgment – "I like it", "I don't like it", or "I don't care". The judgment then activates electrical and glandular reactions within the organism that induce pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations within the body(2) and efforts to obtain the object, to reject the object, or to simply ignore the object. These efforts are frequently frustrated, which brings us back to Boorstein's definition of Samudaya as the mind's struggle in response to challenge. In attempting to meet the challenge of keeping our pleasures and avoiding our pains (which are caused by the simple fact that we cannot avoid doing at least one of seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling, or thinking), we find suffering(3) (Goenka, 1987, pp. 30-37). The chain of events that is set up as we react repeatedly to these sensations of craving and aversion is the cause of the arising of Dukkha.

In its description of the arising of Dukkha, Buddhist thought describes human behavior in a way quite similar to the way that modern behavioral psychologists may think of it. In both ways of thinking, behavior is basically an elaboration of cause and effect relationships, stimulus leading to response leading to alteration

of the environment leading to new stimulus and so on. However, where behavioral psychology tends to limit its realm of inquiry to what Ken Wilber calls "Flatland", Buddhism extends over a much wider and deeper universe(4) (Wilber, 2000, pp.70-72).

Nirodha

The third Noble truth is the truth of Nirodha, or the cessation of Dukkha. In Boorstein's words, the third Noble truth states that "The end of suffering – a non-struggling, peaceful mind – is a possibility" (Boorstein, 2002, p. 39). That there can be an end to Dukkha implies that there must be something that is outside of it. Since Dukkha is the primary reality of all that is mind and matter, that which is beyond Dukkha must also be beyond mind and matter. This "place", or state, is called Nirvana, and is important only in that it represents a final goal and a "place" in which Dukkha is finally overcome.

Though the Buddha was a practical teacher and refused to teach about a thing if "it is not useful, it is not fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life..." (Rahula, 1974, p. 14) still, many attempts have been made to describe Nirvana. As the Buddha originally made clear, however, this is essentially a fruitless task since Nirvana is beyond comprehension by one who has not personally experienced it. All that is necessary to understand is that there is a final goal that is beyond the realm of Dukkha, Nirvana is this goal, and you will know it when you get there.

Nirodha is, however, more than just the concept of some place beyond all suffering that may or may not exist. Nirodha is also the promise that there is a way to realize this place, or state, and that any person can deliver her or himself from the world of suffering through dedication and practice.

Siddhartha Gothama, the Buddha, investigated the nature of his own body and through deep meditation into his own nature discovered the cycle of conditioned arising that is part of the four Noble Truths. He realized that the reality of suffering is dependent on a process of constant reaction that goes on through the cycle of conditioned arising. He also realized that if this cycle (or chain, as it is often called), could be broken, then the process could begin to run in reverse. Rather than continuously creating more suffering, one could begin to unravel the great Gordian knot of past actions and move toward a place of greater internal peace and harmony.

In the cycle, contact with a sense object leads to sensing which leads to perception – recognition and valuation of good or bad. Once a valuation has been made, body sensations immediately arise and one starts liking them or disliking them.

...a sound has come ...words...words of praise...good – and one feels a pleasant sensation throughout the body. Or else: a sound has come...words...words of abuse...bad – and one feels an unpleasant sensation throughout the body. Sensations arise on the body, and are felt by the mind; this is the function called vedana. (Goenka, 1987, p. 27)

The key to breaking the chain, and setting the process of becoming into reverse, is to learn to develop a sense of equanimity in which sensations can be observed without fear, judgment, craving, or aversion. This is, of course, not a simple thing to do. However, the Buddha taught that it is possible through practice of Vipassana meditation (which will be described later), and through adherence to Magga – The Eightfold Noble Path.

Magga

The most practical of the four Noble Truths is the fourth – Magga. This is the Noble Eightfold Path, and is the way taught by the Buddha to traverse the field of Dukkha and eventually arrive at Nirvana. The elements of the Noble Eightfold Path are described by Sylvia Boorstein as:

1. Wise Understanding: realizing the cause of suffering;
2. Wise Intention: motivation to end suffering;
3. Wise Speech: speaking in a way that cultivates clarity;
4. Wise Action: behaving in ways that maintain clarity;
5. Wise Livelihood: supporting oneself in a wholesome way;
6. Wise effort: cultivating skillful (peaceful) mind habits;
7. Wise Concentration: cultivating a steady, focused, ease-filled mind;
8. Wise Mindfulness: cultivating alert, balanced attention (Boorstein, 2002, p. 40).

Wise speech, action, and livelihood are grouped together into the category of Sila, or morality. This part of the path is built on the concept of universal love and deals with abstaining from all actions that are not wholesome and all actions (be they physical or vocal) that harm other beings or disturb their peace (Rahula, 1974, p. 46; Goenka, 2002).

Samadhi, the second division of the Noble path contains the elements of wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration. Together, these aspects of the path foster a sense of "one-pointed concentration of wholesome mind..." (Goenka, 2002). Without Samadhi, the practice of Sila is much more difficult, because it requires great effort, concentration, and mindfulness to abstain from harmful actions.

The third division of the Noble Eightfold Path is called panna (pronounced "punnya") and denotes the cultivation of insight through wise intention (thought)

and wise understanding. Insight leads to wisdom and wisdom leads to understanding of the reasons for practicing all of the other divisions of the path. As the reasons for practice become clearer, the practice becomes stronger, and as the practice becomes stronger, the depth of insight increases. In this way, each element of the path works with all of the other elements to create a positive spiral of healing and spiritual growth (Rahula, 1974, pp. 46-50; Goenka, 2002)

Each of the Noble Truths defines a function that needs to be performed by one who wishes to follow the Buddhist way. With respect to Dukkha, the Truth of the nature of life, the function of the Buddhist is to *understand* it clearly. With respect to Samudaya, the origin of Dukkha through the cause and effect actions of craving and aversion, the Buddhist must make every effort to *destroy* or *eradicate* it. The third Noble Truth is Nirodha, the cessation of Dukkha in the state of Nirvana, and the function performed by the Buddhist is to *realize* it. Finally, Magga is the path to liberation, and here it is the function of the practitioner to *follow* it (Rahula, 1974, p. 50). By performing these functions, Buddhist teaching predicts that one will find benefits of greater peace of mind, greater harmony, greater sense of purpose, and greater contentment here and now, in this life. Moreover, these benefits are seen to be equally applicable to anyone who follows the Path, be they Buddhist, Christian, Moslem, or Jew. The Path is not seen to be sectarian, but is simply a road to walk toward a more peaceful way of being.

Buddhism and relationship

The love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man is often the floor to which people fall after the collapse of other dreams. It is held to be solid when nothing else is, and though it frequently gives way and dumps them into a basement of despair, it still enjoys a reputation of dependability. (Nyanasobhano, 1991, p. 2)

Improving intimate relationships is not a direct goal of Buddhism, and in fact there is very little Buddhist doctrine directed toward relationships. Buddhist monks do not (for the most part) perform marriage vows and do not have any authority to say that a marriage should or should not be dissolved. Bikkhus (monks) may "give their 'blessing' *after* the civil wedding-ceremony has been performed. But even this is really more of a concession to the laity than anything else" (Walshe, 1986, p. 9). In addition, though the Buddhist tradition has its own correlate for the Christian commandment of "thou shalt not commit adultery", the intention behind the Buddhist precept is much different. While the Christian commandment is clearly a law, the Buddhist precept to "not commit adultery" (Rahula, 1974, p. 80) is more of a guideline for good practice. Adultery is not seen by a Buddhist as a sin so much as it is seen as a practice that has unhealthy and unhappy consequences, and one that can cause a person to stray from the Path. There is therefore no moral judgment on the subject, simply the understanding that committing adultery is harmful to one's self and to others

(Walshe, 1986). Though the Buddha did not speak against marriage, he considered it as more of a hindrance than an aide, and monks remain celibate while they wear the robes(5).

Buddhism, therefore, does not concern itself greatly with intimate relationships. However, the goals of Buddhism are to increase the ability of the practitioner to live a peaceful, loving, and healthy life. The Noble Eightfold Path is one that discourages the use of alcohol and intoxicants, discourages actions that are harmful or hurtful be they physical or vocal, and encourages responsibility, caring, selfless love, understanding, and compassion. The Noble Path, in fact, challenges the Buddhist to develop the capacity to relate to all others with a greater sense of compassion and greater ability to find communion in the shared experience of the act of being human.

The practice of the Dhamma (living in accord with Buddhist principles), and the practice of committed relationship can be mutually enhancing. Relationship is a crucible wherein the qualities represented by the noble eightfold path may, and even must, be employed and so the practice of Dhamma and the path of committed relationship may share many common goals. It must be remembered, however, that practice of the Dhamma is bigger than relationship, extending into much wider realms. The path of Dhamma may be practiced through relationship, but the Dhamma will eventually transcend relationship. It is for this reason that this study is entitled "The Dhamma Path **Through** Relationship". Mindful attention to practice of the Buddhist principles represented by the four Noble Truths seems likely to be an aide to finding peace and harmony in relationship. However, such a practice is a path through relationship on the way to someplace else – not a practice in which relationship is the end goal.

Vipassana

What does the experience of meditation reveal in the human heart? Underneath the self-protective shields of anger, aggression, possession, and control lies the well of clear, simple, loving, energetic, vital life. (Fleischman, 1999, p. 35)

We must look at ourselves over and over again in order to learn to love... (Kornfield, 1993, p. 34)

To understand the practice of Vipassana, it is first necessary to have an idea of what meditation is, of what principle forms of meditation exist, and of the relative benefits and detriments of these various forms. Meditation is a term that describes all concentrative practices somewhat in the way that the classification "animal" describes all living beings that are not plants, fungi, monerans or protists. There are commonalities in all things called "meditation", but there is tremendous variety in the intent, form, and effect of these things.

Just as the members of the animal kingdom are classified through division into phyla, classes, orders, etc. forms of meditation can be divided into a number of large categories, each with many subcategories. An exhaustive list of even the large categories is not practical within the scope of this review. However, most forms of meditation involve holding the attention of the mind through use of an object of concentration, and these "objects" can include anything from an image of a deity, to a sound, to awareness of body or breath. The type, or form, of object used as the focal point is one way of categorizing different meditation practices.

Many types of meditation teach concentration through focus on an external object such as the flame of a candle, a light, or an image of a deity. Focus on these images creates an anchor to which one can return over and over as the mind attempts to follow its habitual path of erratic jumps from thought to thought. Through dedicated concentration, the object of focus absorbs all attention, and the mind grows still. This is one purpose of meditation – to still the mind and to learn to better control it. "Sitting is, among other things, the practice of self-control" (Fleischman, 1999, p. 7).

If the chosen object of focus is a deity, then the object becomes not only an object of focus, but also an object of intent. Through intent directed toward the qualities of the deity, the meditator gradually begins to realize these qualities to a greater extent in his or her life. Similarly, if the object of focus is a mantra(6) then the meaning of the word or syllables, and the vibration of their sound are thought to convey specific qualities. Here again, the object of focus serves the double purpose of concentrating the mind, and of conveying specific qualities to the person who is meditating.

The object of focus in these techniques, visual or aural, can be either external or internal. Visual focal objects can be pictures, idols, objects from nature, mandalas, or any physical object. They can also be the mental representation or visualization of this object even if it is not physically present. So too, focal sounds can be any repeated word, sound, or prayer, and can be either uttered out loud or repeated silently in the mind. Whether internal or external, the purpose of focus and concentration is fulfilled.(7) Whether a Christian prayer, a Buddhist chant, or a Hindu mantra is chosen, the common result of concentration through sound and devotion is present.

Meditation, therefore, is not the exclusive domain of Buddhism, nor even of Eastern religions. Meditation is a part of every religion in one form or another, and is generally used as a way to approach more closely to the mysteries that reside in the worlds beyond words, thoughts, and conceptualizations. However, thoughts and concepts can themselves become objects of meditation, and are used in this fashion in analytical meditation forms. "In this type of meditation, one uses reasoning," the Dalai Lama explains. "Reasoning can enhance positive

states of mind and overcome the attitudes, thoughts and emotions that lead to suffering and dissatisfaction" (Cutler, 2001, p. 34).

One's physical body is yet another focus for meditation, and is the basis of the practice of Vipassana, which will be introduced shortly. Focus on the body can include such things as utilization of specific postures to attain specific results (as in some forms of yoga, or meditation on a mudra(8)) or focusing on a process such as breathing or walking. Body awareness meditation can also range in subtlety from a comparatively gross and large-scale awareness of positions or movements to an extremely subtle awareness of minute sensations as they arise and pass away in all parts of the body.

In addition to the categories of meditation form, there are also categories describing the goals of meditative practice. Ken Wilber describes these goals as existing on three levels: Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya (1996, p. 112).

Nirmanakaya represents those practices that focus mainly on body energies and include such things as the practice of hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, pranayama, and other body or body-energy oriented practices. Sambhogakaya practices are those that deal with a higher level of energy and attainment and are focused on subtle levels of attainment of bliss. Dharmakaya deals with what Wilber calls the causal regions.

It operates through neither tantric energy manipulation nor subtle light and sound absorption, but rather through inquiry into the causal field of consciousness itself, ...until all forms of subject-object dualism are uprooted." (Wilber, 1996, p. 112)

A simplification of these three goal categories could be thought of as "body", "soul", and "transcendence". Meditative practices focused on "body" generally deal with physical health and well-being, unblocking of body energy meridians, and stabilization of the conscious mind and thought process. Those that focus on what I have called "soul" are generally also effective in the physical realm and will help with body health. However, the goal of these practices is not centered on body health, but is instead directed toward realization of the subtler energies of mind in what Wilber refers to as "...the high subtle regions" (Wilber, 1996, p. 112). Practices of this sort are exemplified by Kirpal Sing, an Indian teacher who inspired his followers to realize an inward connection with the high-subtle realm which is

...universally and consistently said to be the realm of high religious intuition and literal inspirations; of bijamantra; of symbolic visions; of blue, gold and white light; of audible illuminations and brightness upon brightness; it is the realm of higher presences, guides, angelic

forms, ishtadevas, and dhyani-buddhas; all of which...are simply high archetypal forms of one's own being... (Wilber, 1996, p. 78)

Dharmakaya practices are forms of meditation and practice that have effective benefits in both the areas of "body" and "soul", but do not focus on these areas(9). Instead, Dharmakaya practices focus on realization of non-duality, and inquiry into the causal field of consciousness. "This is total and utter transcendence and release into Formless Consciousness, Boundless Radiance" (Wilber, 1996, p.84). In realization of the high-causal realm there is "...no meditator, and no meditation, nor is there any awareness of an absence of these. There is only radiance"(Hixon, 1978 as cited in Wilber, 1996, p.85).

The goal of a meditative practice is an extremely important consideration when deciding on a form to which to devote time and energy. Meditation is a tool, like any other tool, and it is not generally helpful to use it for purposes other than it is intended. Just as a screwdriver does a poor job of hammering a nail but is very useful for turning screws, so too visualization of a particular object is very good for concentrating the mind, but is not a particularly effective way to develop insight. Developing the ability to hold a yoga pose can be very helpful in keeping the body healthy, but is not necessarily an effective way to examine the deep unconscious of the mind. Though most meditation techniques lead in a similar direction, some have the power to go much further along the path than others. In addition, some meditation techniques can actually hinder growth by creating stronger projections of what one wishes to be true, rather than helping to see what really IS.

If one's goal is to look deeply into the nature of things as they truly are, Vipassana meditation is a good choice of practice. Vipassana is a form of practice that utilizes observation of sensations in the body (bhavana) as its object of concentration, and one that resides in Wilber's classification of Dharmakaya (Wilber, 1996 p. 112). However, it has several special claims that set it apart from other body-oriented forms of meditation, as well as from other forms of object oriented practice.

The concept denoted by "Vipassana-bhavana" denotes "...the systematic development of insight through the meditation technique of observing the reality of oneself by observing sensations within the body" (Goenka, 1987, p.123). Vipassana literally means to "see clearly", and though it is derived from principles elucidated in the Buddhist thought system, it is a non-sectarian practice consisting of "ordinary experience plus mindfulness plus equanimity yielding insight and purification..." (Marlatt, 2002). The non-sectarian nature of Vipassana is an important part of the teaching, as Vipassana is intended for people of all races and creeds. Somewhat in the way that the discovery of the principles of flight has enabled people of all religions to travel by airplane, proponents of Vipassana stress that observation of the reality of sensations in the body can be practiced by all people, regardless of their world-view or religious beliefs.

In contrast with other practices that utilize stable objects, sounds, or visualizations as concentration points, the focus of Vipassana is the constantly changing process of arising and passing away of sensations in the body. Rather than concentrating on an external object or sound, or an internal projection of an object or concept, Vipassana teaches the meditator to focus on the reality of his or her own body, as it is in the moment. In addition, rather than being mindful of relatively large scale movements or feelings as in other forms of mindfulness meditation, Vipassana works to constantly sharpen the awareness and move to deeper, subtler levels of experience. These differences in focus make a huge difference in the ultimate results obtained through the practice.

Returning to the summary of Buddhism presented earlier, it may be remembered that in the four Noble Truths, Buddhist teaching explains that there is suffering in the world, that suffering arises out of the mind's struggle in response to challenge, that there is an alternative to suffering, and that there is a way of living that will lead to this alternative. Vipassana is a practical tool by which the necessary self-discipline, self-awareness, and deep understanding may be developed in order to walk the path of enlightenment that the Buddha mapped out(10).

The object of focus in Vipassana meditation is not something that is fixed, but is instead the ebb, flow, and change of sensation within the body. As discussed earlier in the description of the cycle of conditioned arising, contact of the body's sense organs with sense objects creates a chain reaction of sensing, perceiving, feeling (sensation arising in the body), and reacting. In Buddhist teaching, every thought in the mind is inseparably united with a sensation or group of sensations somewhere in the body. Therefore, if one becomes aware of sensations, one then also becomes indirectly aware of thoughts.

In Vipassana meditation, the meditator practices sitting still with whatever thoughts and sensations arise in the body. As awareness sharpens, the mind is able to move ever more deeply into the body, and to perceive ever more subtle sensations. The focus of the meditator is to remain constantly aware of what is happening in the body, while maintaining an understanding that all that arises will also pass away. Every sensation that comes must also eventually go, as it is the nature of the universe to change. Therefore there is no need to react, though sensations may seem to be painful or pleasurable. The function is to simply be aware, to maintain a sense of equal mind (equanimity) to all sensations, and to work to stop the struggle of the mind between what is wanted and what truly is(11). In this way, awareness is brought into the cycle of conditioned arising, the chain is broken before reactions can occur, and the cycle begins to run in reverse (Goenka, 1987; Vipassana Research Institute, 1996). This very basic and fundamentally simple process can lead a meditator through progressive stages of self awareness, gradually unraveling the knots of experience that have formed. Initially addressing physical and surface mental complexes, awareness is

gradually refined and purified sinking through layer after layer toward the goal of realization of the infinite.

Though there have been relatively few studies done to determine empirically the effectiveness of Vipassana meditation, available studies tend to agree that Vipassana does have positive physical, psychological, and emotional effects. One such study found that following a seven day Vipassana retreat for teen-age and young adult participants in Thailand "...the self perceptions of participants were more favorable, and coping became characterized by greater maturity and less reactivity to common stressors" (Emavardhana, 1997). A related study of people who had taken a 10-day Vipassana course in Muscat, Oman suggested "that the practice of Vipassana meditation may help mitigate psychological and psychosomatic distress" (Al-Hussaini, 2001).

A study currently in progress in Seattle is evaluating Vipassana's effectiveness as an intervention technique for inmate populations. Though the results of this study have not been finalized, preliminary findings indicate that inmates who have learned to meditate are less likely to return to prison than inmates with similar backgrounds who have not learned meditation (Marlatt, 2002). Similarly, results of studies carried out in Indian prisons suggest that inmates who have learned Vipassana meditation show an increased degree of awareness of their emotions leading to a reduction in feelings of anger, tension, and hostility (Chandiramani, 1995; Khurana, 2000).

Vipassana meditation is not necessarily a cure-all, and does have possible negative consequences. This meditation technique is a powerful tool for penetrating the system of ego defenses that a person has developed and laying open patterns of established behavior. Undergoing this sort of intense self-scrutiny can cause a high degree of anxiety in some people, and can result in adverse emotional experiences, or the exacerbation of psychiatric problems (Emavardhana, 1997). Truth, it seems, is not always a welcome visitor.

Though Vipassana must be used only with great care by people who are experiencing psychosis or other severe mental disturbances, for people who are in possession of a reasonably healthy sense of self, it can have great benefits. My own experience as a meditator attests to the fact that it is extremely difficult to gain insight into one's own thoughts, feelings, and "humanness" without also developing a greater appreciation for the humanity in others. Though the abstract goal of Nirvana may be very far away, still the technique of Vipassana can have a powerful positive influence in this life, in this moment, and in whatever place or situation in which it is practiced.

Vipassana and Relationship

Two seconds ago she was dodging the hot splattering oil and ready to burst out" "Get lost! I'm cooking!.... Get out of here!"

But now, as the direct, wordless experience of annicca(12) fades, she finds herself musing inwardly: "Across from me right now is another being, my husband, who has been the center of my companionship and support, who has devoted his own fleeting life to the mutual care of our family. His body and mind are impersonal cosmic dust, atoms of earth. Yet we have shared compassion and joy. Will such a friend, will such a sacred partnership ever emerge again in world after world for me? Why not use this moment to express my gratitude for his friendship and encouragement on the path?" (Fleischman, 1999, p.107)

The experience of Vipassana meditation is one that directs a meditator toward ever-deepening understanding of both the frailty and the nobility of the human condition. Through deep focus on the experience of sensation in the body, the reality of the transitory nature of all things (annicca) becomes apparent – not simply as an intellectual idea but as a felt sense of truth within the body. So too, as one plumbs the depths of the mind, the terrific internal pain that arises as a result of such things as anger, hatred, and ill-will towards others begins to be actually felt. Normally, this pain is covered over by layers of defenses that render people distant from their bodies and unaware of their own emotions or feelings. Once one has come into contact with these deep and painful layers and experienced the direct cause and effect relationship between the painful feelings and angry or violent actions, it becomes more difficult to sustain feelings of hatred and enmity. Instead, one becomes increasingly aware that each moment of life is precious and that each moment of contact with a loved partner is something to be cherished. The concerns that once caused discord can gradually be given a new perspective, and the need for control can be relaxed. Vipassana develops the intent, while also providing the tools, for practicing constant awareness of the necessity of choice as well as awareness of the internal effects of choices made.

Viktor Frankl once suggested that the Statue of Liberty on the East coast of the United States should be balanced by a Statue of Responsibility on the West coast (Frankl, 1984). As one develops greater understanding of the deep inner consequences of one's own actions, the intimate connection between freedom, choice, and responsibility becomes more clear. Within an intimate relationship, this awareness is one that may gently move each partner to ever-greater levels of respect and care for themselves; with this care for self can come true compassion for another.

Relationship

What makes love such a "deep" experience does not depend upon our knowledge of the other (which may be minimal) but rather what we dig up from the depth of ourselves. The exhilaration that

accompanies falling in love is only half the discovery of one's lover; the other half is a (re-)discovery of oneself. (Solomon, 2001, p. 149)

The paradox of a loving relationship is that there is a constant tension between forces of individuation and forces of union – "The individuality and togetherness forces" (Gilbert, 1992, p. 12). On the one hand, the highest ideals of relationship are ones of joining, merging two souls, communion, and sharing of two lives as one. On the other hand, part of the human condition is to be a separate self, charged with the task of individuation and with the process of maturing into a person who knows her or his own wishes and needs. That these two goals (to one degree or another) exist side by side on a daily basis within all intimate relationships is one explanation for why there is such turmoil in the quest for "love".

Relationship, it seems, is an aspect of the togetherness force, while love may be associated with either of the two forces. The fact that love and relationship are so closely associated with each other can be confusing, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one from the other. "That is why it is important to clarify and distinguish the two, to insist that love is the experience, a relationship the medium (together with mind) in which love develops" (Solomon, 2001, p. 83). Love itself is, of course, not easily defined and distinctions must be made here as well. Consider the ideas of love represented by the following quotations:

Love is "...an action, expressing emotion, a verb... Loving is a process..." (McKeen, 1996)

Love "...is the song the universe sings to itself... the poetry of the senses... the name we give to sexual passion that is transfigured by emotion. Mutually felt, it binds two people like nothing else." (Jaksch, 2002, p. 10)

"Love is a story" (Sternberg, 1998)

Love is "...a readiness that must be conscientiously adopted." (Solomon, 2001, p. 73)

"Love is making friends with fear." (Welwood, 1990, p. 48)

It is very difficult to build an understanding of relationship without first defining what is meant by love, and as is shown by the definitions above, love is an exceptionally diverse and multifaceted concept. Yet, a study of relationship, I believe, would be rendered somewhat suspect if there was no attempt to define the territory in which love roams. To do this, it is necessary to understand a bit of the history behind present day conceptions of love, as well as to look at some of the theories and stories by which love is perceived.

Romantic Love

With the gray age of spiritual deadness upon us, we love, or beg for love, or grieve for love. We have nothing higher to live for.
(Nyanasobhano, 1991, p. 3)

...Western Culture has no history of happy romantic love within marriage... (Schnarch, 1997, p. 15)

What passes for "love" on the movie screen, in popular song, and in much of Western Culture is often referred to in literature as "Romantic Love" (Schnarch, 1997; Welwood, 1990; Solomon, 2001; Gilbert, 1992) and this sort of love has its beginnings in the middle ages with the idea of courtly love. What is often misunderstood about romantic love is that it is only a beginning in the spectrum of the development of love, (McKeen, 1996) and in the modern day context it is a relatively short-lived phenomenon. Though romantic love once had a relatively positive purpose, in the modern day context it is more often a bane than a blessing. Far from the goal of highest aspiration, in which capacity it often resides in the modern media, romantic love is a fleeting and capricious state that is poorly advised as a basis for long-term decisions or commitments.

In the context of the medieval court, romantic love had the possibility of being maintained over a reasonably long term and to be somewhat stable – if not particularly satisfying. Within this context, marriage, romance, and sex were completely separate ideas. Though the separation of the three was the cause of a great deal of angst, this separation was also the essential ingredient that allowed for stability within the romantic relationship.

The social pressures of the time dictated that marriage be arranged with respect to duty, or for purposes of material gain or support – a convention that effectively removed romance and love from the arena of most marriages. However, the "togetherness" force is very strong and relationship without real contact or caring is not fulfilling. For those who had the time and leisure to consider it, the drive to unite with another person in a loving way was very strong.

Though the structure of society was such that realization of the drive for union was virtually impossible, unhappy marriage partners learned to direct their romantic aspirations toward safely unobtainable goals. The romantic love of a Knight for his unobtainable Lady (and vice versa) developed to the point that love of one for the other became closer to worship of God or Goddess. This love was something that could only exist outside of marriage, and that could only exist if there was no opportunity for extended contact. Actually being in contact with the person who is the object of devotion is one of the best ways to kill romantic love, for it is impossible for any mortal to live up to the dreams of divine perfection projected by another.

However, love of this sort was a great relief to the boredom and drudgery of marriage. In fact, romantic love can be seen as a rebellion to the often painful and distasteful situations engendered by marriage unions (Welwood, 1990, p. 2). Trapped within the rigid structures of feudal society, the Knight and the Lady used the fantasy that they built of each other as an escape and an antidote to a situation that was otherwise often highly distressing. Modern day affairs are often built on a similar basis.

Sex was, of course, forbidden to romantic lovers and this proved to be an exceptionally strong reason for continued interest in the relationship. There is nothing better for a "love" story than a tragic reason that the two lovers cannot get together; the struggle to unite against all odds becomes the crucible in which each are tested and in which their individuality (and the story) is grown. Though the ending of these stories is generally unhappy, the main characters are endowed with a strong desire to be better for the sake of the other. Thus, forged out of a Freudian sublimation of the sexual drive, romantic love became a powerful force for betterment of self and search for perfection(13).

Though it seems somewhat paradoxical, the strong desire for union engendered by romantic love was transformed into personal growth and differentiation(14) of "self" in the context of the medieval court. This was made possible due to the separation of the two main forces at work within all human relationships. On one side is "togetherness" - the force of attraction and the desire for union manifested by feelings of yearning or fears of abandonment, and on the other is "individuality" - the force of repulsion and need for differentiation, manifested by feelings of inundation or fears of being engulfed (Gilbert, 1992; Rosenberg & Kitaen-Morse, 1996; Welwood, 1990; Schnarch, 1997). In the medieval court these two forces were held apart by the strict rules and harsh punishments of the society. Their separation created a very strong state of desire in lovers that remained stable due to the fact that consummation of their love was an extremely hazardous enterprise. Many a romantic love ended with the union, and subsequent speedy capture, of the lovers – a fact that further empowered tragic romantic mythology. Modern day romantic love, however, is not restricted by such rigid social structures. When desire arises, it is often quickly sated, and so functionality of romantic love for the purpose of self-growth is mostly lost.

Moreover, romantic love in feudal times was available only to the select few who had the power, time, and leisure available to them to be able to move beyond survival considerations and duty to the collective community. It is only in quite recent times, with the advent of an affluent and individualistically inclined culture that romantic love has become available to a majority of people - at least in Western Cultures (Solomon, 2001).

Though highly sought after, romantic love has proven to be quite problematical, and the near 50% divorce rate sported by the United States and Canada (Sternberg, 1998) p. 6) is a tribute to the double edge of its sword. Romantic love

in modern times has lost the connection with the divine that is the only thing that made it worthwhile in the first place. Hollywood type love stories promote the sad belief that fulfillment can be found in a dream, that love is both the way to salvation and a feeling that is inextricably bound to physical attractiveness and that, once found, the feeling of love will continue into "happily ever after". Confused by a materialistic society and a decline in trust in spiritual traditions, modern citizens of Western culture are often left in the sad position of believing that romantic love is the highest ideal that there is to live for (Nyanasobhano, 1991).

Perceptions of Love

Divorce rate statistics seem to be a cause for alarm, and are often quoted with reference to the good old days and the moral decline of modern civilization. However, there is some cause to think that things may not be quite so glum as they seem.

...rather than becoming discouraged, we could appreciate that we are trying to do something unique, which few societies have ever attempted, much less succeeded at – namely, to join romantic love, sexual passion, and a marriage of equals in a single, enduring relationship. (Welwood, 1990, p. 2)

If we were to step ahead in time a few centuries and look back at the contributions to love made by the society of today, it is likely that this time would be seen as a great seething cauldron in which the search for meaning in relationship was being played out, and the path toward a balance of the forces of individuation and of union was being forged. For, among its many facets, love is a socially constructed concept, and is one that is deeply rooted in the collective history of a society, as well as in the personal history of a woman or a man. Love is, at least in part, "...a Story" (Sternberg, 1998, p. X) and the stories of love that are brought into the individual relationships of today form the mythology of tomorrow.

Individual stories, or themes, of love vary from themes where the "other" is seen as a teacher, a victim, or an object in one role or another, to those where the partner is a fellow traveler, a helpmate, a recovery nurse, or an equal and respected individual. Relationships may be built on themes of conflict, fantasy, home building, business, and many others (Sternberg, 1998).

Modern writers on the theme of relationship may be categorized according to the particular story from which they write, and in my readings two major categories stand out. Many writers come from a point of view where love and relationship are seen as a "cookbook" (Sternberg, 1998), or a recipe. Writers and therapists who work from this point of view tend to prescribe solutions, name principles, and suggest particular techniques whereby love can be made better, or by which

relationships can be healed. Sources of this sort include the writings of John Gottman (1999) and his Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work that speaks of techniques for nurturing fondness, solving problems, overcoming gridlock, and creating shared meaning. Other themes for this style of relationship, or relationship therapy, include the idea that there are common predictable patterns in relationships, and that these patterns can be overcome with the use of special relationship techniques. Using sets of questions to get to know your partner better and specific exercises for nurturing closeness, appreciation, compassion, honesty, dialogue, time, vision, freedom, play and surprise are given as ways for improving relationship (Jaksch, 2002).

Other authors suggest that setting goals, (Fincham, 1999) enhancing perceptions of equity (Larson, 1998), improving communication (Gordon, 1999), and teaching acceptance of emotions (Denton, 2000) are methods of improving satisfaction and happiness in marriage.

Looking for ways of predicting the outcomes of relationships are also common with the cookbook style of relationship story, and articles citing ways to tell if a marriage will last or if therapy will be successful are quite common (Patz, 2000; Wagner, 1999; Bray, 1995).

The other main category of relationship literature that I have identified focuses on the idea of relationship as "path". From this point of view, relationship is seen not so much as an end in itself, but as an especially effective means of promoting personal and spiritual growth. The primary motivation for relationship from this perspective "is not sex or companionship or children or the convenience of a relationship but a sense of self worth" (Solomon, 2001, p. 239). In other words, though techniques for enhancing relationship are considered well and good, this perspective sees the search for self within relationship to be a much deeper and more personal journey. The fundamental truth of relationships for those who consider relationship to be a path of self-discovery is "as without, so within" (Welwood, 1990, p. 120). All that arises externally is seen as a mirror of internal processes, and relationship is thus a way of gaining insight into self.

Relationship of author to audience, and author bias

<i>...If I told you that the depth of your Sorrow</i>	<i>If I told you That your beauty Is all there is</i>	<i>Would you hear me? Would you go with me To the place</i>
<i>Is the height of your Joy</i>	<i>And across this gulf Of inches</i>	<i>Where Universes collide? Would you look into my</i>

<i>That love</i>	<i>As I watch the universe</i>	<i>eyes</i>
<i>And pain</i>	<i>In a teardrop</i>	<i>And see...</i>
<i>Are one,</i>	<i>Sliding, slowly...</i>	<i>Your Self?</i>
<i>That dreams are</i>	<i>How I long for you</i>	(Blattner, 2002)
<i>Illusion's snare</i>	<i>To see the power</i>	
<i>And all</i>	<i>Of your soul...</i>	
<i>That you know to be true</i>		
<i>Is wrong...</i>		

It is at this point in the narrative of this study that I (the author) will begin to make my own voice more clearly known. This is a qualitative work, focused on understanding the experience of relationship, and as such the relationship of author to audience, and researcher to that being researched, should not be ignored. My own biases toward, and opinions about, relationship cannot help but color the tone and intent with which I write the words that you are reading; to ignore the relationship between the person behind the keys of this computer and the person reading the script is to ignore the most basic premise from which the text is written.

The transition that you have just witnessed is a transition from a writing style steeped mainly in the right hand upper quadrant (objective, "it") of Wilber's four quadrant model of the full spectrum of experience to the upper left hand quadrant (subjective, "I"). In making this change, I am hoping to step from behind the one-way mirror that is a pretense at objectivity, and move into a place where my relationship with what I write, who I am writing to, and what I am studying will be evident as a complex and interlinked set of connections.

At this point in the narrative, it should be reasonably clear that I believe meditation to be a good and helpful thing, and that I have a special appreciation for Vipassana as my practice of choice. Though Buddhism is a system of thought that seems to make a great deal of sense to me, I have been brought up in a primarily Christian culture and therefore have many ties to the Christian religion and world-view. I do not find that my Buddhist and Christian beliefs are in conflict with each other, however, but rather that they compliment each other quite nicely in most cases. I am also a product of North American (specifically Canadian)

culture, and have been steeped in the dream of romantic love that is so omnipresent in this present time.

It is important for you (the reader) to know this, as it has a bearing on what I will say and on the questions that I ask about relationship. If I were a native of Samoa, for instance, the idea of romantic love would likely not be something that I would even consider. Due to a culture in which sex is not made artificially scarce through conventions of possessiveness and moral strictures against sexual license, "...romantic love as it occurs in our civilization, inextricably bound up with ideas of monogamy, exclusiveness, jealousy and undeviating fidelity does not occur in Samoa..." (Mead, nd. as cited in Solomon, 2001, p. 49) I am not a native of Samoa, however, and so my ideas of relationship have been built on the popular stories of Western culture – "Romeo and Juliet", "Casablanca", "When Harry Met Sally". I am of a generation in which the constant barrage of the media is virtually inescapable and in which it is difficult to find a song, or a movie, or a television show, in which the ideal of romantic love is not pressed into weary service.

I am also a product of Puritan ethics and Victorian prudery that have wended their way through time to instill vestiges of guilt and shame in the idea of the sexual act. As well, my ancestors must have been among the troubadours singing hopefully beneath the window to a fair lady's tall tower for I have found tendencies to place my loves on uncomfortable pedestals. Paradoxically, I am also a product of the sexual revolution with ideals of free love arm wrestling gamely with Catholic ideals of monogamy.

In my search to better understand the meaning of love, I have found that my own ability to derive meaning from the joys and tribulations of my experiences is bound closely to a perception that love is about personal path. My own story, then, is tied much more strongly to the ideal of looking through the lens of love to nurture and grow a stronger and more caring sense of self, than it is to stories in which love and relationship are a business proposition(15), a sacrifice(16), or even a garden.(17). Though I find that techniques and tools from the relationship cookbook approach can be helpful, I also find that they are not enough to answer the deeper existential questions or to fill the deep longings and stirrings of my soul.

Relationship as Path

The penetrating quality of an honest, loving connection wears away our facades, bringing out the best and the worst in us. ... Real intimacy, in short, brings up our unfinished business... (Welwood, 1990, p. 90)

To put it bluntly, a great many people who claim to be looking for love are in fact searching for a relationship and would in fact be

quite unhappy with the emotional trauma that often comes with love. (Solomon, 2001, p. 84)

The first noble truth of Buddhism – Dukkha – refers to the fact that it is impossible to avoid pain in life; the fourth noble truth – Magga – explains how the cycles of pain and suffering can be accepted with more artistry and grace, and eventually transcended entirely. In the Buddhist tradition, the bad news is that suffering exists and must be accepted. The good news is that there are ways in which life can be lived with artistry and joy and in which suffering can be transformed into meaning and personal growth toward a higher purpose. In general, Buddhists have a very practical outlook on life, believing that it is more helpful to accept and work with things as they are than to attempt to escape through fantasies of what one believes to be better, or to control by way of beliefs of the way that things should be.

Just as Jesus' actions in the temple, when he threw out the moneylenders, deny that Christian humility is the same thing as weakness, so too the Buddhist attitude toward acceptance of "what is" is not a fatalistic resignation to the whims of fate. Acceptance of reality in its aspects of external circumstances, internal perception and acceptance of the responsibility for personal choice that is an inherent condition of being human, implies an attitude of strong determination and a focus on unequivocal goals. Walking a spiritual path, be it Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or any other, requires a special kind of courage, a special dedication, and a determination to use the events that unfold as a way to work toward a higher goal. As Nietzsche said, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*", (As cited in Frankl, 1984, p. 97) and it is the ability to derive meaning from life that makes the difference between emptiness and fulfillment.

Though often, and unfortunately, confused with spirituality, relationship as path is actually a subset of the human search for meaning. If relationship becomes an ultimate goal, or if it becomes entangled in romantic ideals of love where the partner becomes a means of salvation, then the meaning of "path" is lost. Path denotes that there is an ideal that is beyond understanding, yet which underlies all that exists and all that is a part of human experience. Path becomes distorted if relationship is seen as an end in itself, an avenue to heavenly bliss and realization of a greater sense of being. Path is also distorted if it becomes affixed to the physical, earth-bound aspect of a particular person in a form of addiction and inability to let go.

In the heavenly distortion, addiction to our own excitement prevents us from devoting ourselves to another person. In the earthly distortion, addiction to the other person prevents us from feeling the larger source of aliveness within ourselves. When we can bring these two sides together, joining heaven and earth, true devotion –

passion without fixation – becomes possible. (Welwood, 1990, pp. 72-73)

Letting go into the joy and pain of love is a task that, like devotion to a spiritual path, requires a great deal of courage and dedication. As such, many people who believe that they desire an intimate and loving relationship are not actually prepared to do the work involved in creating one, or choose to live with stories in which love is not a path and personal growth is not a priority. I am not attempting to put a judgment on this type of choice, as I do not believe that one kind of story is inherently better than another. However, I do believe that many people become confused by the discrepancy between their expectations of relationship and the realities within which they live. Choosing to include love as a part of an overall path in life is one way of beginning to reconcile these discrepancies, and to begin building more satisfying relationships.

Vipassana and Relationship

The discrepancy between expectation and reality, you may recall, is the second noble truth of Buddhism, *Samudaya*, and is not confined only to relationship. Reality often does not live up to hopes and expectations, and this sense of separation is often enhanced by the strictures of religion. While very few people would argue with the Golden Rule of "Love thy neighbor as thyself", there are also very few people who consistently live by this rule. In the same way, while most people would profess to desire a happy and fulfilling relationship, it is somewhat difficult to actually find a working example of such a thing.

The question, then, is how to go about reconciling the discrepancies, and it is a question that is enthusiastically answered by relational "cookbooks" as discussed earlier. However, the techniques involved, when boiled down to their basic essence turn out to be values such as intimacy, commitment, compassion, empathy, truthfulness, kindness, respect, and peacefulness and skills such as seeing clearly, self control, and redirecting thoughts (Jaksch, 2002; McKeen, 1996; Gilbert, 1992). Somewhat unsurprisingly, this set of values corresponds rather well with the ideals for behavior taught by most religions, and is remarkably close to the suggestions for living given by Siddhartha Gothama in his Eight-fold Noble Path(18).

Though the ideals are well known, and have been well-known for millennia, the problem remains that they are not easy to practice. It is far easier to say "Love thy neighbor" than it is to actually practice this when he forgets to return your hammer for the 27th time, or refuses to help pay for the fence that you both agreed to build between your properties. It is even harder to practice in a relationship at the height of a power struggle when your partner is convinced that she is going to take the new job in Chicago, and you are sure that she is ruining your life by forcing you to leave Fairbanks.

The idea of relationship as path can help to give positive meaning to situations like these and to de-escalate the tensions that are involved. Focus on self, a strong sense of values, and a higher goal or ideal can help to reframe the perceived context and to create avenues for resolution that would not otherwise exist. As self-awareness and self-knowledge increase, so too does the overall differentiation of self and with this differentiation comes a greater ability to respond with skill to the vicissitudes of life, love, and relationship. Greater self-awareness also helps to uncover the hidden base of most relational fears – the paradox of longing for union while needing to become an individual.

While there are many ways of covering over the longing in our hearts, of running from it, projecting it outward, drowning it, or attempting to fill it through union with another, I heartily agree with John Welwood when he says:

The most appropriate way to address our longing for union is through a genuine spiritual practice, such as meditation, that teaches us how to go beyond oppositional mind altogether, in every area of our life. (Welwood, 1990, p. 203)

From my twelve years of experience as a meditator, I believe that there are few, if any, practices that can be as effective in the development of practical understanding of how to move closer to living relational and spiritual ideals as that of Vipassana meditation.

Conclusion

"To love" is an active verb – it is something that one does, where the phrase "in love" rather points to a situation or a quandary in which we find ourselves... being "in love" is often characterized as a desperate reaching, whereas loving is calm and comfortable.
(Solomon, 2001, pp.180-181)

...relationship, rather than being just a form of togetherness, is a ceaseless flowing back and forth between joining and separating.
(Welwood, 1990, p.117)

The personal meaning that an individual attaches to both love and relationship is constructed from personal experience, family values, societal history, biological imperatives, and spiritual longings. The incredible complexity of this mixture of drives, desires, longings and needs is all played out in the arena of intimate relationship, where each individual attempts to reconcile their own version of desired reality with their perception of the situation in which they find themselves.

Few, if any, societies in the history of the human race have successfully tackled the problem of creating happiness in marriage where sex, passion, love, commitment, equality and respect are all joined into a single package. Indeed,

few societies have ever before given the general mass of their population the freedom and resources needed to obtain a level of individuality in which this kind of love can exist in the first place.

Romantic love, as it was practiced in the medieval court, was an early attempt to find fulfilling relationship. It worked, to a certain extent, because the strong force of togetherness was held at bay by the rigid requirements of the society and lovers were able to maintain their deified idolation of each other. Though romantic love is still held as the ideal by most of the modern media, it is in reality unworkable in the modern context where there are no strict injunctions to separate desire and consummation, and therefore rapid disillusionment with the idolized romantic partner is very common(19).

There are many ways in which the problem of creating fulfilling relationships has been addressed. Some authors believe that relationship is like a cookbook, and can be fixed by applying techniques somewhat like a meal can be prepared with the help of recipes. Experimental results have shown that these types of approaches can be effective in resolving marital discord, but it is my opinion that they do not address many of the deeper questions. Technique is a helpful ally, but technique on its own does not necessarily create understanding.

A second way of working with relationship is to begin with an understanding that the two forces spoken of by the Taoists as Yin and Yang, personified by the Hindus as Shakti and Shiva, judged by Christians as good and evil, unified by Buddhists as annicca (change), and spoken of in this paper as togetherness and individuality are at the base of all human interaction. With this base as a starting point, it is also asserted that differentiation of self, focus on self-awareness, and individual responsibility for choice in all actions is paradoxically essential for the development of strong relationships. The goals and values that are associated with development of self in this way are also associated with the teachings of most religions, and appear to be in line with a universal set of truths about human functioning.

Though the desirability of living in accord with the truths and virtues proselytized by prophets and philosophers alike is seldom denied, the ability to actually practice these ideals is highly uncommon. This fact sets up an opposition between perceived reality and desired reality that is conflicting, discordant, and often painful. Siddhartha Gothama, the Buddha, observed these phenomena and through intense self-investigation formulated the four Noble Truths of Dukkha, Samudaya, Nirodha, and Magga that lie at the heart of Buddhism. Like other founders of great religions, Siddhartha Gothama recognized that there are higher ideals that can be lived by and that greater peace of mind will accompany accepting these ideals. Unlike other leaders, he also formulated a specific form of practice to help people to realize these truths for themselves.

The practice that the Buddha handed down to the generations of his followers was that of Vipassana meditation – a technique dedicated to learning to see clearly through the practice of intense and subtle self-examination. As we have established, self-knowledge and understanding are basic to realization of relationship as path. Though the purpose and intent of Vipassana meditation is not the development of relationship, I believe that the skills and philosophy that it teaches are both highly applicable to building strong and lasting relationships.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on the methodological procedures of phenomenology and on existential philosophical tenets. As such, procedures used in gathering and processing information were centered on building a conceptual image of the lived experience of a small number of people. In contrast to quantitative studies, emphasis was placed on the subjective experience of study participants rather than on gathering data to be used in statistical enquiry.

Phenomenology has been selected as the methodology of choice because of its strong correlation with my own belief that there can be no truly "objective" interaction between people. Phenomenology is based on the supposition that on a very basic level, the observer and the observed are not separate from each other, and are in a constant state of affecting one another. Even though I may never know who you are, dear reader, I have written to you and my words have been affected by the fact that I have an audience.

What is Phenomenology?

*Classical psychology only makes sense if one admits from the start that man is constitutionally made of two distinct "substances".
(Thines, 1977, p. 29)*

Even before Descartes wrote his famous words "Cogito ergo sum", and certainly since, there has been a strong tendency to consider the mind as being separate from the body and the observer or thinker as being detached from what is being observed or thought. In fact, much of the trend of scientific thought from the Renaissance to the present has been bent on solidifying the idea of "objectivity" that is central to the scientific method. Separation, reductionism, and a search for determinism have been the hallmark of scientific thought over the past several centuries. From Newton's pool ball atoms and clockwork heavens, to Skinner's stimulus-response behaviorism, the world in its popular conception has been reduced from its pre-scientific mythical/magical state to one in which the only reality considered is the one that can be observed, dissected, and counted. The idea that objectivity is possible has become so commonplace as to be considered unquestionable.

Objective observation has an extremely important role to play, and is responsible for many of the advancements that have created what we call the modern world. However, even physicists have long ago shown that it is actually impossible to observe physical phenomena without affecting what is observed, and in the realm of psychology the idea of objectivity is even more insubstantial. Though psychology has attempted to join the physical sciences as an objective science in its own right, the fact remains that psychological investigation is carried out with living (and often human) subjects, and "The subject is a living body in a world of intentional significance. It is not a pure reactive system as imagined by Behaviourism" (Thines, 1977, p. 18). Even if it were possible to conduct an investigation of human behavior without the investigation affecting the behavior in any way, it is unlikely that the observations could be made completely free of the influence of the researcher's presuppositions.

"Methodology rests upon philosophy" (Valle, 1978, p. 54), and as we have seen the philosophical basis for phenomenology is that of intrinsic relatedness between the observer, the act of observing, and that which is observed. Working from this basic assumption, the difficulty arises that investigations must be subjectively based, and if this is the case, how can reliable results be obtained?

Moving a step closer to practical application, the phenomenological researcher works with the reality of connectedness by acknowledging its pervasiveness and by including it as a part of the study. As I have noted several times already, I am an integral part of the results as well as the process of this study, and so it is very important for me, and for you, to know of my opinions, presuppositions, and ways of thinking. Combining an understanding of my own thoughts and prejudices with the subjective experiences of the people that were interviewed has provided the phenomenological matrix from which common themes and images can emerge. "Phenomenology is a method which allows us to contact phenomena as we *actually live them out and experience them*" (Valle, 1978, p. 7). Finding the points of union in the lived experience of a group of people is its goal.

Returning for a moment to philosophy, thinkers such as Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) considered phenomenology as a study of pure phenomena. They posited that it is possible to "...suspend all judgments about what is real... until they are founded on a more certain basis" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Becoming aware of presuppositions and judgments and making them explicit allows the researcher to theoretically refrain from reacting to previous knowledge and experience (to "bracket off") and to thereby observe the pure phenomena. Complete bracketing, however, is virtually impossible, as the act of making presuppositions explicit has the effect of allowing deeper assumptions to emerge which are then bracketed off uncovering more presuppositions and on and on in a continuing process.

I think that it is interesting to note at this point that the process of bracketing off is highly analogous (and in fact synonymous) to the process of mindfulness in meditation. As a meditator moves ever more deeply into her or his own

awareness, presuppositions (Sankara, reaction patterns) continually arise. As one refrains from reacting to them, they pass away and new ones arise. The process of preparation for phenomenological research, then, is itself a form of meditation and can be aided by mindfulness techniques.

Existentialism

...every truth and action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity.

(Sartre, 1985, as cited in Brady, 1998)

The search for meaning in life is an integral part of existential philosophy, which "as a formal philosophical school, seeks to understand the human condition as it manifests itself in our *concrete, lived situations*." (Valle, 1978, p. 6) As a philosophy, existentialism is a very good companion to the ideals of phenomenology, and in many ways is also quite compatible with Buddhist thought. All three of these thought systems reach for experience *as it is*, for reality devoid of constructions, and for existence without commandments. At its base, existentialism confronts us with radical and terrifying freedom, asserting that a self is constructed from the choices that it makes and that there are no rules to say that one way or the other must be done.

This is not to say, however, that one should therefore abandon all restriction and live with the sole intent of pleasure or gratification of ego desires. Absolute freedom implies absolute responsibility.

In order to be free ourselves, we must desire the freedom of other people. To treat another person merely as an object for my use is to make an object of myself. [Therefore] To be free I must respect the freedom of others. (Banach, 1991)

The Golden Rule is still very much alive, well and operating within the realm of existentialism.

There are some basic incompatibility issues between existentialist thought and natural scientific methodology(20). Though both of these viewpoints offer a way of reducing reality into manageable constructs, the natural sciences go about the reduction through focus on what is observable and "objective" and on dissection into smaller pieces. In behavioral psychology, the focus on natural scientific methods leads to asking questions about "doing" – because the things that people "do" are observable. In contrast, phenomenological methodology tends to focus on questions having to do with "being" – internal states that are not so easily quantified – and on reduction of reality through construction of meaning in lived experience.

Existentialism and phenomenology are very well suited for each other because both are concerned with the real experience of the person that is behind the behavior. In seeking to grapple with the fundamental issues of death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness, existentialism delves into the heart of what gives meaning to life. Phenomenology – the study of lived experience and the meaning that can be derived from it – is well matched as an investigative methodology with which to study the necessary abstractions of existential philosophy.

Putting it all Together

We have now arrived at a point very near to the end of the theory, and are closing in on the actual investigation. We have investigated two philosophies (Buddhism and Existentialism), two methods of practice (meditation, specifically Vipassana, and phenomenology), and one state of being (relationship), and we have seen in some respects how they are related. However, in doing so we have also skimmed through 2500 years of history, delved into the realms of philosophers and of scientists, critiqued methods of investigation, and investigated the background of human connectedness. This is quite a lot to come to terms with, and I think that a bit of integration is in order.

Vipassana is related to Buddhism and meditation as phenomenology is related to existentialism and experimental methodology. Both Vipassana and phenomenology are specific practices in their own right, members of a group of practices in a larger category (meditation or research methodology). As practical techniques, both Vipassana and phenomenology may be practiced, or used, on their own. However, deeper significance may be derived from each of them if they are informed by a philosophy that helps to explain the way in which they function. In the case of Vipassana, Buddhism is the philosophy that is best suited to this purpose, and in the case of phenomenology I believe that existentialism is best suited. This is not to say that other philosophies cannot be applied to either of the practices. Feminist philosophies are one of several other thought systems that are used as a backdrop for phenomenology, and Vipassana can also be practiced in conjunction with Christian or other religious philosophies. I have, however, chosen to make the connections that you have seen because of my own beliefs and way of seeing the world. This is yet another awareness of my own bias that will be important to both you and to myself when collecting and interpreting (or reading) the data and results of this study.

There now remains the state of being of relationship to connect into this puzzle. Vipassana and Buddhism are a practice and philosophy of self-awareness and self-revelation(21), and the general consensus of relationship researchers seems to point to the positive contribution of self-awareness to relationship. This being the case, it seems logical to link Vipassana with relationship.

However, an untested hypothesis is an untrustworthy idea, and so this study was designed to investigate how the practice of Vipassana is experienced in

conjunction with relationship. This is not a statistical study trying to prove one point or another, but an investigation of the lived experience of meditation practitioners with the hope of synthesizing commonalities of experience that support (or not) the idea that practice of Vipassana can be beneficial in relationships. As such, research methodologies that rely on statistical analysis and natural scientific modes of inquiry were not appropriate for this study. I chose Phenomenology because it is best suited to the purposes that I had in mind.

Steps in the Process(22)

Procedures of study in the phenomenological tradition generally begin with building an understanding of the philosophical basis of the approach to studying experience of a phenomenon. The researcher then generates questions that will help to explore the meaning of lived experiences of participants in the study.

Data collection generally involves interviewing participants, and is supplemented by researcher self-reflection and observations. Data analysis begins with dividing the data into statements that can then be clustered into groups of similar meaning that are then expressed using psychological and phenomenological concepts. These clusters of ideas are tied together in a narrative type of description of what was experienced and a structural description of how it was experienced. The study should conclude with "the reader understanding better the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists" (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

Personal experiences of the researcher should also be included in the study, and rhetorical practice should be informal, including use of the first person and reference to personal experience, thoughts, and impressions of the author (Creswell, 1998).

Participants

Data for this study was obtained through in-depth interviews with 7 participants. Phenomenological methodology is based on the common lived experience of a similar phenomenon, and so participants were selected with the use of criterion sampling strategies (Creswell, 1998, p.118).

Criteria for participation in this study included the requirement that participants had practiced Vipassana over a period of at least two years, had attended at least four eight to ten day Vipassana retreats, were maintaining a commitment to continue a daily practice of meditation, and were in a committed relationship that had lasted at least one year.

Seven participants fitting these criteria were interviewed, four men and three women. Ages of participants ranged from 25 to 53 years, with an average age of 42. Relationship duration ranged from 1.5 to 20 years, with an average of around

8 years. Years of Vipassana practice also ranged quite widely, from 3 to 20 years. Three participants had practiced for 3 years, 3 in the 10 to 15 year range, and one for 20 years. During this time, participants averaged about eight ten-day courses, with the number of courses per individual ranging from 4 to 15. All had also taken part in other sorts of courses, from 1 three-day course, to several 20 day, 30 day, and 45 day courses.

Only one participant was in a relationship with a partner who was not also a practicing meditator, all but one were currently employed or self-employed, and average income level was in the \$15,000 to \$25,000 range. Education levels varied from secondary school to a Master's degree, with most people possessing a Bachelor's degree. Two participants had children currently living with them, all were Canadian, all currently reside in Alberta or British Columbia, and none claim affiliation with any particular religion. For a further breakdown of participant demographic information, please see Appendix E "Participant Demographic Information".

Initial Contact

Participants were contacted initially by email and/or telephone. Most participants were people that I have met at previous retreats that I have attended. However, an introductory email message(23) was sent to a wider range listserve, used by people involved in Vipassana related work and activities in British Columbia, Canada.

The initial email or phone contact introduced the topic of the study and the participation criteria and requested volunteers to take part in the interviews. Potential participants were made aware that there was no obligation to take part, and that initial agreement also carried no obligation to continue. They were also made aware that should they agree to participate or not, any communication with them would be kept anonymous and their names would not appear in any aspect of the study or of the data.

Preliminary questionnaire

Following initial contact and agreement to participate, participants were sent two copies of a consent form(24) by regular mail, and asked to sign and return one copy. On receipt of the consent form by myself, participants were sent a preliminary questionnaire(25) by email. This questionnaire was focused on the collection of demographic information.

Phone interview

On completion of the preliminary questionnaire, participants were contacted via email or telephone to arrange a time for a telephone interview. The interviews

lasted between thirty and sixty minutes in length, and were recorded for purposes of transcription.

Phenomenological interviews are best conducted using an interview protocol containing approximately five open-ended questions, and the interviewer should refrain as much as possible from offering extra questions or advice, sticking as closely as possible to the protocol (Creswell, 1998, pp. 124-125). Interviews in this case were carried out using the seven question protocol, found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

- **Transcription of interviews:** Recorded interview conversations were transcribed to create interview protocols, and all names referred to in the interview were changed to protect the identity of the person being interviewed.
- **Identification of key words and phrases:** The question studied was: "Does practicing Vipassana enhance the experience of an intimate relationship?" Phrases and words in the protocols that pertain to this question were noted and extracted from the main text.
- **Cluster phrases into themes:** Identified words and phrases were compared and clustered into themes of common meaning.
- **Refer back to protocols:** Once initial clustering was accomplished, the original protocols were again consulted to validate that the identified themes were representative of the intent and experience of the interview participants. If discrepancies were noted, themes were adjusted and reworked to better represent the sample.
- **Formulate results:** The themes and theme clusters were placed into context with each other and integrated into an exhaustive description. The exhaustive description forms the results section of this study.
- **Statement of fundamental structure:** The exhaustive description was condensed into a clear statement describing the fundamental structure and meaning of the data.

Results

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Summary
Age	33	51	32	25	53	53	46	25- 53 avg. 42
Sex	M	M	M	F	M	F	F	4 M, 3 F
Partner age	25	34	29	33	53	53	47	25 – 53 avg.

								39
Time in relationship	1.5	7	6.5	1.5	9	9	20	1.5 – 20 avg. 7, but most < 7
Years Vip. practice	3	11	3	3	15	10	20	3 – 20
# of 10 day Courses	4	7	5	4	15	15	4	4 to 15 avg. ~8
Other courses	1, 3 day	Several 7, 10, 20, 30, 45 days	1, 4 day, 1 Tibetan 10 day and 1 10 day Thai	Several, 3 and 4 day	10	Annapana Thailand	5, 7day	
Practice before relationship?	1 year	3 years	No	Yes 1.5 years	Yes 5 years	Yes 1 Year	No	0 –5years, avg. 1.6
Partner Practice	Yes 3 years	Yes 7 years	Yes 1 Year	Yes 3 Years	Yes 11 Years	Yes 15	No	
Employed	Yes	Self employed	Yes	Yes	No	Self Employed	Self Employed	
Occupation	Actor/ Educator	Investor	College Instructor	Youth leader	Software developer	Artist	Teacher and artist	
Income level	10,000 to 19,000	Prefer not to say	20,000 to 29,000	10,000 to 19,000	20,000 to 29,000	20,000 to 29,000	10,000 to 19,000	~\$15,000 to \$25,000 avg.
Education	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	Master's degree	Secondary and diploma in theater	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	Bachelor	
Children	No	2	No	No	No	No	1	
Nationality	Canadian	Swiss/Canadian	Canadian	Canadian	Canadian	Chinese, Thai, Canadian	Canadian	
Area	Alberta	BC	Alberta	Alberta	BC	BC	BC	
Religious Affiliation	None	None	Life and the Earth	None	None	None	None	

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Raw Codes and Correlations

	PARTICIPANTS							
CODES	1	2	3	6	7	8	9	Totals
Agape	0	3	4	2	0	0	4	13
Agape confusion	2	1	0	9	0	0	3	15
Attract/vibrations	0	0	3	0	0	2	2	7
Balance, equanimity	2	2	1	0	2	0	4	11
brought up	1	0	6	1	0	0	5	13
Can't ignore things	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Challenge	1	0	3	1	0	0	2	7
Dukkha	0	0	0	9	0	0	3	12
Early warning	0	6	0	0	2	0	0	8
Expanding circles	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	8
Happiness not in other	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Impermanence	0	1	1	3	4	2	0	11
Karmic debts	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
Levels of love	0	0	3	5	0	0	6	14
Look for root	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Love - Cultural context	0	0	2	1	0	1	2	6
Love as wanting	2	1	4	2	0	2	3	14
Love for anyone	3	2	0	1	0	0	2	8
Love not romance	2	1	0	0	4	0	3	10
Mean to love	4	8	7	2	4	1	11	37
Mind/body link	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2

More harmony	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
No expectations	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
Not Panacea	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	8
Not quick fix	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4
Other was cause	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	6
Own Strength	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	5
Patience	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3
Perceive partner	3	3	2	3	0	0	3	14
Place for anger	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	3
Positive Change	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Previous experience	1	0	3	3	5	5	1	18
Purpose	1	1	8	4	2	2	6	24
Relationship adds difficulty	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Resolve conflict	3	3	2	6	1	6	2	23
respect, compassion	2	1	1	2	0	2	7	15
rewarding/gratitude	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

	PARTICIPANTS							
CODES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Totals
Same goals	0	1	1	0	0	4	0	6
Self as Cause	3	4	3	6	2	3	3	24
Self Journey	4	0	2	10	0	0	4	20

Selfish	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	5
Service	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	7
Sex	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	6
Share	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	6
Sila	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	4
Something more	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Understanding Self	1	3	3	3	2	4	6	22
Values match	0	0	4	0	0	2	1	7
Walk the same path	0	2	0	2	2	3	4	13
Way to work	2	1	1	5	2	5	7	23
Who I am	1	0	0	2	0	1	3	7
Totals	58	55	77	87	36	54	127	511

Table 2. Raw codes and correlations with Participant's statements

Key Concepts and Themes

The following themes were created through a process of combining, grouping, and ordering raw codes. All raw codes were generated from the interview material, and there was often overlap in their meanings. One code may appear in more than one of the larger themes, and themes were arranged so that they are closest to other categories with which they have the most in common. Raw codes combined in each theme are listed along with the number of total referrals to these codes in the primary documents.

Love Described in Levels

(Raw Codes: Levels of love; Mean to love; Service. Total instances: 61)

Love is not a single concept, but a developmental continuum. It can be classified into the Greek stages of eros, philios, and agapé, but it is never

purely any of these things. The developmental stages of love are an infinite progression, and each person contains a unique mixture of each type of love at any given time. Meditators tend to move from a higher concentration of eros toward greater expression of philios and of agapé.

Pre-Vipassana

Cultural Context

(Raw Codes: Love – Cultural context; Previous experience. Total instances: 25)

Everyone wants you to partner, and we think that relationship is a route of coming out of suffering. When things go wrong, we blame our relationship. There is a BIG difference between the popular conception of relationship and the dhamma conception.

Love as Wanting

(Raw Code: Love as wanting. Total instances: 14)

Love can be a type of attachment to another person in which the other becomes a means of filling a need and a reflection on self. What is given is given with expectation of return.

Post Vipassana

Love not Romance

(Raw Code: Love not romance. Total instances: 11)

The idea of romance falls away and is replaced by deeper things. Sexuality tends to become less important.

Dukkha

(Raw Codes: Dukkha; Impermanence. Total instances: 25)

The Buddha's first noble truth of suffering. Life is challenging for everyone and no-one escapes pain in living.

Agapé

(Raw Codes: Agapé; No expectations. Total instances: 17)

Agapé is the sense of loving without reservation or expectation of return. It is love freely and purely given.

Belief in Something more

(Raw Code: Something more. Total instances: 6)

Relationships in this world are crucially important. However, it is also important to remember that through practice they will one day be transcended.

Love for anyone

(Raw Code: Love for anyone. Total instances: 8)

Love is not just for one special person. If it is ideal love (agapé), then it can be offered to anyone.

Agapé confusion

(Raw Code: Agapé confusion; Sex. Total instances: 21)

The search for perfection can itself become a place of confusion in which it is possible to become lost. Like looking for the space between the atoms by banging one's head against the wall, searching for the ideal of love can also cause suffering. The paradox of the quantum reality and the physical reality, the spiritual plane and the physical one, is hard to reconcile.

Relationship

Previous Experience

(Raw Code: Previous experience. Total instances: 19)

The previous experience of relationship of meditators tended to be painful and unfulfilling.

Understanding Self

(Raw Codes: Understanding self; Who I am. Total instances: 30)

Practicing Vipassana builds a deep understanding of one's inner drives, addictions, and desires, of how the body works, and how one reacts to things. This understanding extends to enable a clearer understanding of others, and a greater capacity for

acceptance of both self and others. Who I am is a mystery, but all that I am is my responsibility and comes from the inside. It does not depend on what happens on the outside.

Other was seen as the cause

(Raw Codes: Other was cause; Perceive partner. Total instances: 21)

Before practicing Vipassana, the other person was seen as the cause of the difficulties and unhappiness in relationship. After practicing Vipassana, meditators looked to themselves when problems arose.

Attract/Vibrations

(Raw Code: Attract/vibrations Total instances: 7)

As one progresses on the path it becomes more clear that the way of being that is on the inside also manifests on the outside. One attracts the kinds of people and relationships that will be an external mirror for the deep attitudes and beliefs that one holds on the inside.

Purpose and Self Journey

(Raw Codes: Purpose; Self Journey; Selfish; Service; Look for root. Total instances: 61)

Relationship is ultimately about the path of purification of the self. It is a "fast track" to purification because it adds the presence of another to act as a mirror and to hold up the truth more clearly. Commitment to another is helpful when walking the path, but the path is still ultimately about the journey of self.

Happiness not in other

(Raw Codes: Happiness not in other; Perceive partner; Understanding self; Own strength. Total instances: 40)

Happiness is not found in one's partner, and should not be expected there. Happiness must come from inside.

Karmic Debts

(Raw Codes: Karmic debts; Purpose. Total instances: 28)

Some (or all?) relationships are a way of working out past Karma. There are connections with some people that feel very old, and the relationship is experienced as a working out of past difficulties with the hopeful end of a sense of peace and resolution.

Relationship adds difficulty

(Raw Codes: Relationship adds difficulty; Challenge; Can't ignore things; Brought up. Total instances: 29)

Though relationship is helpful to the journey of self, it also adds more difficulty because it brings things up more quickly and forces one to see and deal with their own impurities. Relationship is a crucible, not a sanctuary and it provides a container in which it is much more difficult to get away with lying to one's self.

Rewarding/gratitude

(Raw Codes: Rewarding/gratitude; Respect, compassion. Total instances: 17)

The challenge of relationship is also rewarding in that it brings out new experiences and new levels of understanding of self.

Expanding Circles

(Raw Code: Expanding circles. Total instances: 8)

Solving the difficulties that come up in relationship is a microcosm for solving the difficulties that come up in the larger context of the world. Practicing Vipassana in relationship is practicing healing starting with self, expanding to intimate relationship, to relations and friends, and to the world in general.

Walk the Same Path

(Raw Code: Walk the same path; Total instances: 13)

Relationship is about walking a common path, with common goals. It is very helpful for both partners to be meditators, to share common goals, and to speak a common spiritual language. Participants' experiences indicate that not having these common values can create great strain in a relationship.

Values Match, share, same goals

(Raw Codes: Values match; Share; Same goals. Total instances: 19)

It is very difficult to live with a person who does not share the same values and goals. Though it is possible to live with a non-meditator, most participants believe that it is preferable to have a partner who meditates.

Way to Work

(Raw Code: Way to work. Total instances: 23)

Vipassana is a way to work on the problems that come up in relationship. By becoming aware of body sensations and how they relate to thoughts and emotions, and by applying an understanding of the impermanence of all things, meditators are able to bring a greater sense of peacefulness and harmony to their relationships.

Not Panacea

(Raw Code: Not Panacea. Total instances: 8)

It is the nature of Vipassana meditation to bring out ever deeper truths and at times this can be very painful. Vipassana is not an easy ticket to bliss.

Not quick fix, Patience

(Raw Code: Not quick fix; Patience. Total instances: 7)

Vipassana is also about patience. Change is not easy and it is counterproductive to expect it to happen quickly -either in one's self or in a partner.

Resolving Conflict

(Raw Codes: Resolve conflict; Place for anger, Self as cause. Total instances: 53)

Conflict resolution for Vipassana meditators is based on understanding Dukkha and impermanence, on awareness of the subtle physical sensations that are the precursors to emotional tension, on practice of Sila, and on commitment to taking responsibility for one's own happiness, needs, and difficulties.

Impermanence

(Raw Code: Impermanence. Total instances: 11)

It is a basic and universal fact that all things change without cessation, and this fact is a root of unhappiness. It can also be a basis for acceptance and development of a sense of equanimity in the face of all that comes. Be it positive, negative, or neutral, this too will change...

Mind/body link, Early Warning

(Raw Code: Mind/body link; Balance, equanimity; Early warning. Total instances: 21)

Vipassana teaches meditators to be aware of body sensations, and this awareness makes the link between sensations, thoughts and emotions very evident. Awareness of sensations gives early warning for growing tensions and allows them to be dealt with before they get out of hand.

More harmony

(Raw Code: Sila; respect compassion; More harmony. Total instances: 21)

When one practices Sila one practices wholesome thoughts, actions, and words - all of which has a very positive effect on relationships with others. Practice of Sila, meditation, and awareness brings more harmony to relationships on all levels.

Statement of Fundamental Structure

The experiences related by the participants of this study with respect to their intimate relationships and their practice of Vipassana Meditation can be summarized in the following general statements:

- **Love** is a developmental continuum stretching from possessive and needy attachment at one end of the spectrum to a state of profound respect, service, and selfless desire for the welfare of others at the other end. Meditation practice helps meditators to progress toward greater capacity for expression of unconditional love.
- **Relationship** is a path and a journey of self discovery through connection with an intimate partner. It is a crucible in which one's impurities rise to the

surface, and a forum where the large scale problems of conflict in the world can be worked out and resolved, one couple at a time. It is also a deep and compassionate meeting of friends, and an opportunity for joyous communion.

- **Vipassana** meditation is a way of working with self and emotion that can lead to a deeper sense of peace, fulfillment, compassion, and caring in relationship. It is not a panacea, not fast, and not easy. However, it provides a philosophy, a structure, and a method that is an unquestionable aid in creating satisfying relationships.

Discussion

In the literature review I discussed Buddhism, relationship, and meditation as three legs of the conceptual stool on which this study rests. In discussions with the study participants, I found that these three legs were generally supported as aspects of each person's experience.

In general, the people with whom I spoke agree that Vipassana is a way of working and a tool for creating greater harmony and peace in life and in relationship, whether that relationship be with a significant other or with all people and all things. In keeping with the idea of having a way to work, there was general agreement that relationship comes with a sense of path; the journey of self toward greater understanding is aided by the mirror of relationship with other and relationship provides opportunity for developing the virtues of acceptance, service, forgiveness, and love.

An interesting departure from my original hypothesis, however, is that Buddhism does not play as large a role as I had expected. I must qualify this by saying that the ideals of Buddhism do play a huge role, and all participants spoke of the qualities involved in the Buddhist path. The teachings of the Buddha are an integral part of the teachings of Vipassana, and are a direct theoretical framework for the practice, and so in this sense, Buddhism is very much a part of the experience of these people's lives. Vipassana however is quite a pragmatic practice, focusing on the here and now, and on the experience of the individual. As such, the practice of Buddhism as a religion is not emphasized, and indeed,

none of the participants profess to practice any religion at all. Though each of the participants made it clear to me that their spiritual path was, in belief and in practice, a top priority, this spiritual path does not seem to involve subscription to a particular faith or sect. Rather, it is seen as an aspect of living in the world with as much art and skillfulness as possible, of using the time given in this life as an opportunity to look within, and of developing an ever greater capacity for love.

The ideal of love was a central topic of conversation in the interviews, and is a foundation for relationship. Vipassana meditators have a very high ideal of what love is, and a great deal of "brutal" honesty when it comes to evaluating their own ability to love. As meditators move more deeply into their practice, they both improve in their capacity to care for others, and become more aware of the motivation behind what they think of as "Love". Meditation, then, seems to engender a progression through various levels of understanding of love, while relationship provides an often humbling forum for practical application of the ideals and new learning.

Love

I don't think because I love [my partner] this much, that I have this much less love to give to other people. I think it's like an infinite quantity... (Participant 4)

...to give and want to see him happy... want to see the one I love happy, and... being positive and kind to themselves... (Participant 6)

Popular opinion tends to see a lover as a healer and relationship as a place of retreat and comfort - as Van Morrison says "you fill my heart with gladness, take away my sadness, ease my troubles, that's what you do" (1989). Love begins with the bliss of romance and ends happily ever after as the hero and heroin ride off into the sunset.

Though the meditators that I interviewed confessed believing in the popular myths of love in their younger years their real-life experience did not confirm their beliefs. Several spoke of pre-meditation experience of relationships as being "...horrible...ended in misery..." (Participant 4), "Needy" (Participant 5), or "very difficult and very unhappy" (Participant 6). Others had more positive pre-meditation relationships, but the general consensus by those who had experienced relationship before and after learning about Vipassana was that the change was like "night and day" (Participant 5). Though there were many factors involved in this change, one of the major changes was in the idea of the meaning of love.

For the most part, people described their pre-meditation understanding of love to be in line with what seems to be understood as the norm in Western culture. In

this context, relationship is seen as something that is generally expected of everyone, and as a means of obtaining happiness – in Roberta Flack’s words, "you are my heaven" (1981). Pre-Vipassana relationships were generally seen as ends in themselves, attempts to fill a void, fulfill expectations of others, or satiate a sense of need. Romance, by most participants, had been experienced as a series of ups and downs, ending in a sense of lack of fulfillment.

The ideal of romantic love was recognized by most participants, and described by Participant 4 saying: "...sexual relationship... we think, is one of the most powerful ways of coming out of the suffering...". The cultural context is such that there is a very strong emphasis on relationship as a way to become whole, to be healed, or to find happiness. The more common reality of this dream is also expressed by Participant 4, who continued by saying "...and then when we don't come out of that suffering, we blame our relationship".

As people move deeper into their meditation practice, previously unrecognized motivations begin to appear to them. These motivations are not always pleasant to see, nor always flattering. The practice of Vipassana is such that it uncovers layers of reality, one by one, pointing out where we have deluded ourselves, and where our perception of the world is getting in the way of seeing a larger truth. In the case of love, it was generally accepted by participants that an early level of love is the level where one would "define love as a type of attachment to a person" (Participant 2). This type of love is what seems to be accepted by the majority of people in our culture and is certainly the type of love expressed in Hollywood’s portrayal of romance.

Romantic love, and love as attachment, can succeed in situations where the lovers never get together, or in situations where partners are successfully able to maintain set roles. However,

A basic law of the psyche is that whatever we try to exclude from consciousness will keep trying to regain entry, until we recognize and include it as part of who we are. ...we need a more expansive view of commitment – as a journey of two people learning to open more fully to life, through working with the whole of who they are. (Welwood, 1990, p. 95)

The meditators with whom I spoke were people who had begun to experience the need for greater wholeness, and to recognize a desire for deeper meaning and commitment in their lives. For some, this need came after experiencing several unsuccessful and painful relationships, and for others it was a felt sense from the very beginning. In either case, the definition of love-as-attachment and the surface viewpoint of relationship as a route to happiness in and of itself, were seen as fallacies. As meditation practice pointed out the truth of the motivations behind what were previously considered loving behaviors, these meditators began to see that there was less altruism in their actions than they had

previously believed. "...I didn't love the other person. I was just putting on this affection, this show to satisfy myself, to reward myself with their presence... and I did want lots in return..." (Participant 1)

I know from my own experience the shock that comes with realizing that my motivations are often more base than I would really like to admit. Beneath the layers of ostensive caring, beneath the surface layer of love-as-attachment, is a swampy region of moiling needs and desires, all trying to find some route to fulfillment. As I have attached to (and become detached from) other people I have begun to see how I project my needs onto them, and attempt to use them to fulfill my own desires. This is not something of which I am proud, but it seems to be a truth that is bigger than I am – an admission that is necessary for attainment of the "more expansive view of commitment" spoken of by Welwood (1990). As one participant says, laughingly quoting from her Vipassana teacher, S.N. Goenka,

"Don't think that you love each other", you know, "Look deeper, you don't love your husband". It's... I don't know when he said that and where but after that I've always thought about that... If you're really honest and you look at all of your emotions and you get deep down to your basic ego drive and what you need in the world to survive and you ask yourself 'do you love this person?' It's like, what if they did something? What if they spent all the money and ran off with someone else – would you love them? No. (Participant 7)

Like picking up the broken glass and bits of beer-sogged napkin in the bright lights after a party, Vipassana tends to remove the glamour from what once seemed to be a pretty exciting diversion. The Buddha's first noble truth of Dukkha (suffering) becomes more evident, and one is no longer content to hide in the imagined safety of previous illusions. Vipassana is a tool that points out the dirt in the cracks, the illusion behind the lightshow, and the disappointment behind the misplaced hopes. As such, one may be tempted to ask why anyone would want to go there. It is difficult enough to get on in the world without looking at the details of dirt, ignorance and pain that lurk just beneath the façade of our diversions. The concept of actually searching these things out can seem just short of ludicrous.

However, there is a payoff to doing this work, and the payoff is both subtle and profound. Letting go of illusion is both painful and freeing, both a descent into starkness and chaos, and an opening into the possibility of greater experience. As one participant said "...I think there is a little bit of difference – a BIG, not a little bit, BIG difference from the love of the normal...situation without practicing dhamma". (Participant 6) This difference is the ideal of unconditional love versus love-as-attachment, and the "dhamma" that is referred to is a word referring to the totality of practice as taught by the Buddha, encompassing all parts of the eight-fold path. Vipassana meditation helps in the realization of the benefits of a

lifestyle devoted to dhamma, and in making the mental and physical transition into new ways of being that enable closer approximations to ideal love.

Meditators spoke of this change as a falling away of old addictions, old habits, and unhealthy associations. One person stated that "...since Vipassana came into my life, ...I've felt I've... been tuning into different vibrations because the people I'm attracting in my life are so different..." (Participant 3). Another participant expressed a similar idea, saying "So I think that ...I don't have the same level of partner ... if I don't have the same level of thought..." (Participant 6). As life-style, thought patterns, and beliefs began to change, these people's relationships also began to change for the better, and the differences that they realized in their new relationships seem to have been experienced as welcome and positive in direction.

And I would say, maybe, if a couple would have been blind for many years and then they would see each other for the first time, I would say that they would consider that as an amazing experience now, being able to see each other. However, I feel, and I'm trying to be humble and not to be, like you know, to say Vipassana is the best and the greatest, but I have a strong feeling that if these people would now see each other and they would walk [together] ... for many years until [they learned] Vipassana, they would find that afterwards in coming to Vipassana, it's a much bigger step than the step of them being able to see each other. (Participant 2)

The levels of love experienced by the participants of this study were seen, as described above, as openings to deeper insight into both self and other. Each step along the path is a letting go of what was previously felt as truth and an opening into something that is bigger. Each step is a little death, a realization of the changing nature of reality, and a passage into a new and larger conception of what it means to be alive and to be in relationship with another.

Though the steps of this progression are quite possibly infinite, the stages of love experienced by the meditators that I interviewed can be placed into the three categories of eros, philios, and agapé defined by the ancient Greeks. Initial love, romantic love, and old relationship patterns fit into the definition of eros, or passion, sensuality, and attachment. Meditators tend to see eros as a source of both pleasure and misery, and to speak of a movement away from eros toward a greater sense of philios, or deep friendship. In this case, passion in relationship is replaced by a greater depth of understanding –

There's this whole transition from it being quite romantic to being, I would say, friendship based. (Participant 5)

...love, when it manifests in a physical sense, seems a lot to occur less frequently, yet, it's more pure when it does occur. (Participant 3)

The transition away from eros is seen as a natural thing, a part of growing older and a part of the path of spiritual development. The idea that "eventually, you know, if you practice lots and you live that kind of life, you're sex drive naturally goes away..." (Participant 7) seems to be fairly consistently accepted.

The view of sexuality expressed by the meditators in this study is somewhat at odds with the opinions of some current writers about love and relationship, and even with the teachings of some Buddhists, such as Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. David Schnarch speaks of sexuality coming into its prime only in the later years when one has enough life experience and depth to approach more complete appreciation of another human being (Schnarch 1997). Thomas Moore writes that sex has been denigrated to an association with the "...dark trinity of values known as the world, the flesh, and the devil" (Moore, 1998, p. 264). However, he also opines that this view of sexuality misses the importance of accepting and sublimating the shadow, and of the way in which psychological sublimation can be employed in uniting the descendant with the ascendant aspects of human existence:

In sex the soul has an unusually powerful opportunity to join body and spirit.Sex can put us in touch with the sublime. (Moore, 1998, p. 269)

Moore expresses the possibility of sexual union to be associated with debauchery as well as with divinity, and voices both the dangers and the possibilities of embracing sensuality in spiritual practice. Wilhelm Reich associated the release of sexual energy with a natural flow of energy, and its damming as a restriction of the force of life, writing that "The pleasure of living and the pleasure of the orgasm are identical. Extreme orgasm anxiety forms the basis of the general fear of life" (Reich, 1986, chap. 5). In the Buddhist world, Chogyam Trungpa denounced the sexual restrictions of the monastic life and plunged into a path wherein his honest portrayal of who he was involved sexuality, alcohol, and a dangerous balance on the edge of his shadow side. In my interviews as well, questions were raised about the balance between reaching for the ideal and accepting the real:

...if we get too wrapped up in the other worldly and ignore our relationships and ignore the earth and think that it's all an illusion, well, then I think we miss a... necessary ingredient to our enlightenment. (Participant 4)

All of these thoughts, and thinkers, are joined by the common thread of supposition that seeking to follow the spiritual path away from Moore's triumvirate

of world, flesh, and devil, can in itself be a trap. Welwood's assertion that what is excluded from consciousness will continually try to regain entry until included as who we are is, I think, an important balance point for meditators to remember. Though the lives of spiritual masters such as Jesus and Buddha point to a life without sexual attachment, there is a huge difference between attaining spiritual realization and attaining the semblance of it through repression of desires. As one meditator states:

I think that it is an intellectual choice that Oh now, I've got this deep understanding of Vipassana and I'm going to be a person who can love selflessly right away... I'm resisting showing anything unless I think it's pure which I think is cheating myself and her...it may be that it's another way to distance myself or hold power in the relationship by withholding intimacy under the guise that oh, if it's not pure then we don't deserve it... (Participant 1)

The question of purity is one that seems to be often on the mind of meditators, in love as well as in sexuality, and eros is generally seen as the bottom of the purity scale of both. Philios, or brotherly/sisterly love, is seen as being farther along the developmental path, and the most pure form of love corresponds with the concept of agapé (pronounced A – **Gap** – Ay). In agapé there is no trace of attachment, no need of return for what is given. It is unconditional love, based on respect, care, and commitment, and is untouched by the attitudes or deeds of the other person. Agapé is the kind of love demonstrated by the Buddha, or by Jesus, and is a very high ideal indeed, often centered on the idea of service:

I tend to sort of think of myself like serving him more and needing him less, and when I can do that it's such a clear, beautiful place... whatever they're in you can be there for them 'cause you're not there for you. (Participant 3)

Participants invariably found that they were only able to attain this sort of love briefly and on comparatively rare occasions. However, it was experienced as a deeply pleasurable experience – a fact that seems to fly in the face of popular belief. When compared with the popular ideal of love, agapé seems to be more of something to be avoided than sought after. On the surface it can sound like codependance, like complete passivity and lack of initiative to care for one's own needs, or like a giving over of self to another person in a simple dispossession of one's own rights to choice or thought. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth.

The paradoxes inherent in the world as it is revealed in meditation are many, and this aspect of love is one of them. What seems to be passive actually contains tremendous action, and what seems to be a helpless giving over of self is actually a firm and committed decision based on deep courage, tremendous capacity to feel, and clear understanding of self.

Comprehension of agapé is not something that can be had intellectually, as it is not something that originates in the mind. Even the wish to understand agapé is something that must be learned, as the passion of eros or even the warm friendship of philios can seem much more attractive if the power of agapé has not been personally experienced.

If the desire is present, still one cannot understand the meaning of agapé through discourse or reading, or through any means but personal experience. It is also a difficult love, one that requires passing through the purifying crucible, facing one's own humanity, one's own mortality, frailness and powerlessness. It requires burning away the false pride and egocentricity that govern much of human behavior, and rising from the fire like the phoenix, reborn to a greater capacity for feeling, a higher order of understanding of the reality of this world.

Agapé also denotes a paradox in which the capacity to experience the world grows with the subtlety of experience, not with the size of the deed. It is said that an entire sermon of the Buddha was once to hold up a single flower, and understanding of that sermon is a beginning of understanding of agapé. Agapé is a state of grace and is not something that is easily attained; once attained it is even more difficult to maintain. However, step by step it can be approximated, and the practice of meditation is of great service in developing the capacity for this experience. In the words of one meditator:

The feeling is a deep sensitivity toward living things, and life and beauty, and feeling peaceful and harmonious inside. Feeling compassion for all the people who are suffering... acceptance of these people, acceptance of myself, all with sort of you know a sense in my chest of really feeling it, you know I feel really warm and my whole body is peaceful... (Participant 7)

Though the desires and realities of eros, the friendly depth of philios, and the spiritual attainment of agapé can be conceptualized as stages to pass through, the reality is that all are experienced to different degrees by everyone. However, if agapé is the ideal, then it raises a difficult question – how can one attain agapé and still have special love for one particular partner? This question is expressed by participant 4 saying:

I find I like [my partner] as my friend... and we have so much fun together, and yet I'm not sure if that's love, like I almost find it difficult how to love one person...rather than trying to love all people. (Participant 4)

There is a confusion that is set up in the conflicting realities of an ideal of selfless love and a reality in which this sort of love is exceedingly difficult to attain. This is expressed by participant 7 saying "It's funny how you realize you really don't love

that many people. You admire, you respect, you give, you are responsible, but deep deep love, where you can say "I do love" this person, is almost impossible."

Somewhat like the physicist who is aware that there is a deeper reality to the world of matter in which what appears solid is mostly space, but must also contend with the reality that walking through walls is not presently possible, meditators must stretch between the realities of eros and the potentials of agapé. This stretch spans both the ascendant and the descendant, the lowest and the highest, and is one that is not easy to hold onto. Meditation practice continually refines and expands one's ability to stretch between the sensual attraction of worldly desire, and the more fundamental realities that lie beneath surface appearances;

...desire... is the root for the misery because once these desires are not fulfilled we are on into a depression, we are on into ill-will, we are on into anger; the root is there, so if you come out of all of that, then you live a life alone, and so yes, if someone has reached a very high stage, that person will love everyone the same, in the same way. But because this is a very very high state and most of us are not there, and we carry impurities, we have desires, and so therefore it becomes natural that we desire a certain type of food, that we desire, maybe, a certain type of car, or we desire a certain type of man or of woman. And you walk that path. But ultimately, in a very very high state, you'll be out of that, but the fact of life is, that most of us on this earth, we are not there. (Participant 2)

Experience of love is also a function of the self-knowledge of the person in question, and of the truthfulness that they are able to withstand with respect to their own drives, needs, and desires. Meditators who have made quite a lot of progress in their practice tend to be more candid about their baser motivations – a point which can be confusing to non-meditators. With knowledge, the standards are raised, and so what may be seen as perfectly legitimate "love" by a non-meditator is likely to be seen in a less positive light by a person who has been exposed to a larger range of love's potentials, and to a greater depth of knowledge of self.

Kahlil Gibran speaks to this difference in the experience of those who are content to remain on the surface, and those who's paths lead to deeper understanding of love and of self, saying:

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart./ But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,/ Then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor, /

Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears. (Gibran, 1991)

Love is both pain and pleasure, fire and water, fear and comfort. Vipassana can be a guide to love, but it does not only open the door to positive experience. It opens the door to all experience, and those who practice Vipassana tend to "...live quite an intense life..." (Participant 7), laughing all their laughter, but crying all their tears as well. Life is experienced more deeply, and the drives behind the desires and emotions are seen more clearly when one practices Vipassana meditation. From this deeper viewpoint, it becomes more clear that love is not a single idea or state, but a progression of developmental stages.

At one end of the developmental path, love is about possessiveness, need, and the desire to fill the void and emptiness that one feels inside. At this end of the path, love is based on use of others to obtain happiness for self. Only slightly further along the path is the love associated with sexual passion, romance, and eros. Passionate love gradually subsides to make room for a deepening sense of friendship and concern for the happiness of the other, and this in turn begins to build into pure and unconditional love. Though some meditators acknowledge that passionate love can also be purified and grow toward unconditional sharing, it seems to be generally accepted that the desire for passionate fulfillment will gradually subside as one moves along the path.

Love, in its ultimate form, is seen as an ability to be in harmony with one's self, with others, and with the world. It is a deep sense of peace, an ability to feel powerful appreciation for the vibrant beauty of all things, a desire felt deeply in the body to share this peace with all beings, and a sense of profound compassion and acceptance of all that is. Love is grateful, joyful, and expanding. Undiminished by the needs or opinions of others, love gives because that is its nature, and by giving it grows. In contrast to possessive love, unconditional love is a sense of fulfillment of self, joyfully shared with others. It is an ideal, seldom reached, but always present, and it is the guiding light by which meditators steer the course of their journey of relationship.

Relationship

...relationships are tools – not that you're using the other person but they're just to help you move through your stuff quicker. It's like, instead of

having just one shovel, ...you kinda have two. (Participant 3)

...it was actually after my first Vipassana course I decided to get married. It was the deciding moment in my life when I realized that

you can confine yourself and within that confinement you can find freedom...(Participant 7)

The experience of relationship described by the meditators in this study is one that is nearly completely different from what seems to be expected by Western society. Where movies advertise happily-ever-after, Vipassana practitioners focus on the here and now; where advertisements push sex and body image, Vipassana relegates passion and appearance to a much lower level of importance and where popular opinion seems to deem relationship a haven and a balm for unhappiness, Vipassana sees it as a crucible for purification of the self. Perhaps most importantly of all, where Hollywood and the romantic myth point to the need to find the right partner in order to find happiness, the Vipassana meditators in this study see the job of creating peace and well-being as one that must come from within. As one participant expressed "...it would be a wonderful thing for people to understand that... they could have their 'dream' relationship, if they practice... if they were the ones that did the work" (Participant 4).

Coming to an understanding that personal and relational well-being must start from the inside did not happen quickly or easily for any of the meditators. In most cases they described their experiences as a gradual awakening to the knowledge that what was happening in their lives was not fulfilling in one way or another. Relationships were painful or not working, success that should have been satisfying wasn't, ideas of what life was supposed to be about were not standing the tests of reality, and expectations of partners were not being met.

Similarly, the perceptions that people had of their partners changed as they came into contact with Vipassana. Relationships previous to practicing meditation tended to be ones in which "I would look toward the other person for the reason for my unhappiness and I guess, sometimes, my happiness." (Participant 1), and in which "...it was this other person's responsibility to make me happy... and to fulfill me" (Participant 4). The partner was a focus whether she/he was seen as the cause of what was wrong or of what was right.

The practice of Vipassana turned participants' vision ever more inward, and as this happened, they began to notice changes on the outside as well. Old relationships and patterns fell away, new people came into their lives, and a sense of healthier and happier relationship tended to grow. Practicing Vipassana brought a much deeper sense of understanding of self, and with this understanding of self came a greater capacity to also understand others.

If one knows much more about oneself in a very subtle way, what this mind is, what this body is, how they interact with each other, how we react to these things, then we also understand other people much more and we understand our partner much more. (Participant 2)

A paradox of relationship seems to be that as one puts more attention on one's self and one's own development, the capacity to appreciate and be truly present with another human being also grows. Of course, a distinction must be made between the hedonistic search for pleasure that is generally associated with selfishness, and the 'selfishness' that comes about as a result of meditation practice. Hedonistic selfishness is based on a search for fulfillment from the outside, and hence an expectation that, somewhere, one's needs will be met via external objects. Hedonistic selfishness must, therefore, become a worldview in which everything (and everyone) becomes an object to be used for pleasure or to be avoided.

In contrast, 'selfishness' based on practice of dhamma and of Vipassana meditation develops a viewpoint wherein "...I will be the one who causes myself pain or happiness... [I am] responsible for everything that I am now" (Participant 6). Looking deeply and honestly inside of one's self, it is realized that I am capable of all of the good and all of the evil that I see outside of myself, and that I am the creator of my own perceptions. Though I am not in control of the external events that happen around me, my choice alone determines how I perceive these events. So too, all that I see in others, I also could be experiencing, and I therefore have a greater sense of compassion for both myself and others. With meditation practice it becomes more clear that lurking in the depths of every person is the potential to be all things, and that both 'heaven' and 'hell' are just a choice away. Everyone is capable of creating either, right here, and right now.

Descending into the depths of self is an adventure fraught with many difficulties, with the possibility of much pain, and also with the possibility of great joy and comfort. Fulfillment comes not from an endless search for happiness, but from the knowledge that the "...really deep part of myself is right in me and I don't have to search for it in another relationship or move away, or run away from any pain..." (Participant 7). All that is needed can be found within, and with this knowledge can come an incredible sense of freedom. Meditators work to become less reliant on external circumstances for their happiness, and in so doing they work toward a growing sense of freedom for both themselves and for their partners and a greater sense of responsibility for their own feelings. As one meditator expressed:

I've come to an understanding that if I want other people to be more kind or more wise or enlightened...it's my path – I have to do that!
...If you want other people to improve, then you should go on a retreat! (Participant 4)

With such a solid sense of focus on self, it could be wondered why a meditator would choose to be in a relationship at all. As discussed in the literature review section of this study, there are many stories that people can bring into their relationships and around which they structure their lives together. Invariably, the meditators in this study chose to describe their relationships as paths, or

journeys – journeys of the self in partnership with another. Whatever the level of love being experienced in any particular moment – from eros to philios to agapé, participants described the sense of traveling on a journey of purification in which the companionship of a partner was a great aid.

Relationship is depicted as a "...fast track towards purification..." (Participant 1) and "...an expression, or a manifestation of some of the inner work you've done" (Participant 4). It can also be seen as a marker or a yardstick "...some kind of a sign of how you're progressing as a human being" (Participant 4), and as a way of working with life's trials and joys: "...relationships in general are tools..." (Participant 3). Far from the comfortable havens of popular belief, relationships are proving grounds, tests, adventures, and mirrors by which the self can be more readily seen.

Meditators see the path of purification as the first priority in their lives to the point that it may even be realized that, with respect to a partner, "I love meditation more than you" (Participant 7). To a non-meditator this could seem to be a harsh and selfish statement. However, to Vipassana meditators, this is simply a realization of a deep truth, and a statement of commitment to the path. It is also a realization that priority must be given to that which is of greater importance. Practice of the path will lead to greater capacity for love, greater care and concern for the well-being of others, and greater ability to be with a partner.

Kahlil Gibran expresses this difference in priorities when he says "Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping/ For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts" (Gibran, 1991, p. 16) The meditators to whom I spoke are following a path and a philosophy in which it is recognized that the container of life is greater than the container of relationship. It makes little sense to attempt to place a barrel into a teacup, and just as little sense to fix all of one's hopes for happiness in life on fulfillment through relationship. If meditation (and through meditation, the entire inner universe of mind, matter, and emotion) is the focus, then there is an endless source by which the container of relationship can be filled constantly to overflowing. If relationship is the focus, then the teacup will constantly be found wanting in its attempt to fill the barrel. Placing the expectation of fulfillment on another person in this way can be a cruel and heavy burden:

...it's not like I'm expecting to find my happiness from him and I'm not blaming all of my suffering on him, you know, like that's so unfair... that's such a heavy weight, like for anyone to carry.
(Participant 3)

Though placing priority in meditation and the dhamma path above commitment to relationship is seen by meditators as a simple acknowledgment of a truth of life, it can nevertheless seem very threatening to a partner, especially a partner who is a non-meditator. This placement of priorities is based on a set of values that is

often very foreign to non-meditators, and which cannot easily abide with values of relationship in which the path of personal purification is not esteemed. The friction caused by a polarization of values can be very difficult in relationships, and is a topic that was brought up frequently in the interviews.

Participants generally agreed that it was preferable to have a partner who held similar values to themselves. All but one of the participants had chosen dhamma partners – people who were on the same path. Their comments ranged from the certainty that "[before I met my present partner I knew]...my next partner [would] have to practice meditation" (Participant 6) and "the most important thing is that you really want to be with a partner... who has the same goals" (Participant 2), to acknowledgement that "I don't want to become, like so attached to the idea of being with a dhamma partner... but I have to say, it's hard to envision going back to a relationship that doesn't have that..." (Participant 3)

One participant spoke compassionately of watching the struggles of friends who were in relationships in which one partner meditated and the other did not, and another spoke of a couple who had split up because the wife had begun to meditate and the husband had not. The differences in values are compounded as one partner begins to develop deeper sensitivities and awareness and the other does not change as much or in the same direction. Differences tend to grow rather than shrink, and the challenge of remaining in relationship also grows.

There is, however, the possibility of using the differences in values as yet another way of testing and honing the practice of Vipassana. As related by a participant who is in relationship with a non-meditator,

By going the path of Vipassana and meditation... it takes me in a way away from my relationship, but at the same time, it gives me the strength to deal with that, becoming aware of how separate we are and how different and how we both have different paths. It makes me able to deal with that and then I realize that the whole world is made up of different people on different paths and I guess that I learn to accept that... all those emotions, are I think like the roots of all the big major problems in the world, and if you can kind of deal with them on a small scale then at least you can say well, maybe there's a solution on a bigger, bigger scale... maybe..." (Participant 7)

The sense of expanding the circle spoken of by this participant is one that is common to the people that I interviewed. The circle begins with the work of purification of the self, expanding to connections with an intimate partner, immediate family, relatives, friends, and the world. The

...goal is then jointly together to grow, to come out of what makes us miserable and then also, what becomes very natural afterwards is that you want to share it with others. (Participant 2)

Vipassana meditation is, among other things, a tool for managing stress, dealing with anger, processing emotion, and creating positive changes in one's life. The benefits of meditation are first felt by the person who is doing the meditating, but it is their nature to be felt by others as well. This can be a two-edged sword, as witnessed by the difficulties of people who do not live with a dhamma partner. Changes and growth that happen through meditation lead to greater strength, depth, and capacity for compassion, but they also lead to change and to a breaking down of old ways of being. This can be very threatening to a partner who does not have the same desire to change, or who wishes to change in different directions.

On the other side of the sword, however, the effects of the expanding circles are very positive and far reaching.

If there are problems in the world, often the same problem is happening in the relationship and if we want a more harmonious place to live, I do, I want a peaceful place to live, the relationship that I am in right now helps me to understand how to achieve that. If I can achieve it on a small scale then it must help on a bigger scale. (Participant 7)

Meditation takes one deeply into the self, shining light on the inner conflicts and drives. As understanding of self grows, so too does compassion for the weaknesses, pains, and suffering that are detected beneath the defensive layers of personality that are shown to the world. Compassion for self extends to compassion for others as it is realized that all people share a common bond, and the joys and tears of this meditating Self are no different than the joys and tears of the billions who have gone before me and the billions who will come after me. Compassion leads to understanding that the only difference between a conflict within a single mind, a conflict within a relationship, or a war between nations is scale. The issues are the same and the solutions ultimately begin in the same place – deep within the self.

Relationship, to Vipassana meditators, can be a crucible in the most literal sense. It is a place to melt in the heat of the fire of love, to pour forth into the world with greater purity, to be molded and shaped by the forces of life, and to return again to the purifying fires. It is a path, walked with a dear and cherished friend, a journey shared by courageous lovers who can "Sing and dance together and be joyous" (Gibran 1991, p. 16), but who have the strength to also be alone. It can be a sharing of mind, body, and soul, and it holds within its bounds the ideals of compassion, service, and love that is *agapé*.

Intimate relationship extends outward to encompass an increasing range of connections with others. It is a place of action, wherein the conflicts of the world can be observed on a personal scale, and where each person has within his or her power the ability to apply compassion to the pains and conflicts that arise. One person at a time, one couple at a time, Vipassana relationship provides a way to work in which each individual is empowered to transform conflict into compassion and to resolve on a personal scale the perennial discord found on the larger scale of world events. In this way, intimate relationship is a powerful tool for transformation, wholeness, and purification.

A Way to Work

... my life can still disappear anytime, anytime, anytime, really anytime... so when I have some conflict [I know] this will come and go you know. Impermanence - so it happens now, is hot now. It will cool down tomorrow. (Participant 6)

You're not holding onto it, you're not afraid of it anymore. Something has passed through you and you feel lighter and you may not know what it was, but that profoundly affects me because it gives me peace of mind that there is a way to work on the cause and the source of whatever negativity is in me. (Participant 1)

Vipassana is a method by which any person may work toward greater wholeness. The meditators that I interviewed made this fact very clear, and offered a wealth of information about what it means to walk the path of Vipassana meditation. Showing both optimism and realism, participants made it clear that Vipassana was both a comfort and a trial, a tool for peace and a light that could sometimes shine too brightly on painful truth:

In retrospect I've realized that a lot of the big problems that have come up – and they've been major problems – may come from practicing ...I happen to be around people and then I become – you know – I blame these people for these problems, but if I was at a course, I would realize that it was just me and myself. (Participant 7)

Perhaps much more than other forms of meditation, Vipassana is not a transport to bliss. It is anchored firmly in the reality of this time, this place, this feeling – whatever the result may be. Nor does Vipassana work within the time frame that is sometimes wished.

...it would be so nice, you know, if someone could eat a Vipassana tablet, and afterwards come out of misery. Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. (Participant 2)

Working with Vipassana requires dedication, patience, commitment, and practice. As a method it is extremely thorough, very deep, but at times not fast and often not easy. Vipassana, unfortunately, does not bypass the general rule that what one puts in is what one gets out – the only way to obtain (and understand) its value is to experience it for one's self through one's own practice and effort.

The power of Vipassana as a tool in relationship is derived from its focus on the self as the central locus of responsibility, its emphasis on awareness of impermanence, its concentration on physical sensations in the body and awareness of the here and now, and its stress of the importance of the practice of Sila – loving kindness and morality. These aspects of practice were emphasized in many ways by participants as they spoke of their experiences with meditation. While these skills have many applications, one of the principle ways that they are applied in relationship is in the area of resolution of conflict.

The basic principle of Vipassana in conflict resolution is described this way:

If the mind becomes calmer it can pick up many more things and since mind and body are related, if one is angry along with that anger comes a physical reaction which means, for instance, like blood pressure goes up, we produce more adrenaline, heart frequency goes up, respiration goes much faster, and so we see clearly that anger and emotion is linked with the body and a quiet mind can see immediately what any emotion, what impact it has on the body. (Participant 2)

Practice of awareness of sensations provides a system of early warning whereby emotional storms can be intercepted before they have a chance to build. As a meditator deepens his or her awareness of what is happening within the body, he or she is able to detect arising emotion long before it manifests as actions, or even as thoughts. At first, this awareness is more or less confined to times when a person is able to sit in meditation. With much practice, however, the skill can generalize into an ability to be "...more aware of things at that same sort of level as when I would be sitting. For example, I feel a wave of sensation in the body before I feel thoughts – often, not always, but often" (Participant 5).

The advantage of early warning is that awareness engenders an ability to act, and one is therefore able to take action before the emotion becomes too powerful to redirect. "...emotion means energy, maybe, in motion... you see it much earlier and so therefore, it is like a surgeon, if he sees early that the cancer should be removed... you can do something about it. If it is too late, there's

nothing you can do" (Participant 2). With awareness, one is able to communicate one's feelings more clearly to a partner, to recognize patterns, to take steps to care for one's own needs, or to do any number of things to direct strong feelings into positive channels. The key is awareness, as awareness allows choice. Without awareness there is no choice – "...if one is so totally full of anger, boiling in anger, one will then explode, and react. There will be no more action, only reaction" (Participant 2). Without awareness, we are slaves of our own emotions.

With awareness, there are many ways to work with conflict. One way is to realize that all is impermanent, that this too will change, and to simply watch the unfolding of events as they happen without moving to fix them, change them, or blame them on someone else. Participant 5 expresses this idea saying that "I just understand a lot more deeply that we can be thinking one thing one moment and another thing entirely the next and I don't react as much to those changes in myself". Other meditators echoed this idea in their own ways:

I think that's been one of the most brilliant things I've learned from Vipassana is when I'm feeling angry or... irritated by my partner, that I can just realize this is impermanent 'anicca' – it'll pass... as long as I don't get myself in trouble by opening my big yap at that moment... then the relationship is going to continue growing rather than being stifled at that moment (Participant 4).

Because I know that life is changing and I know that one day we will disappear from this world, and we will be finished (laughing), and every day now... we just try to be mindful with our life, as much as we can, just practice together, and be useful for the world... (Participant 6).

Experience of impermanence not only as an intellectual concept but as a felt sense in the body brings a powerful perspective to conflict. It helps to remove the acute tension and the focus on particular issues by applying the perspective of time. Under the light of impermanence the desperate points of argument to which we hold can take on the likeness of the broken statue of Ozymandias lying in a waste of desert and proclaiming **"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"** (Shelley, 1817). We can realize that our dreams of power, our rightness or our wrongness will sooner or later fall to the same fate. "Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away" (Shelley, 1817).

With the perspective of the grinding wheel of time as a backdrop, it is much easier to let go and to agree that "probably most of the time we're both wrong..." (Participant 4). A sense of humor is an important part of the practice and it was a common in my interviews to hear people laughing about their pain and their mistakes as much or more as about their good times. Meditators learn to take

themselves less seriously, and this is another way of working with conflict. If there is not a worry of losing one's self or of having to prove anything, then there is less to lose. "...you don't try to win an argument, basically it's just, you try to grow" (Participant 2).

If there is a shared perspective of responsibility for one's own feelings and actions and of mutual desire to grow, arguments take on a completely different meaning. Though they can be just as heated and intense, they tend not to last as long and resolution tends to come about more easily. Once the intensity has passed the argument can be seen as an opportunity to grow, a chance to look once again in the mirror and discover a hidden secret of one's own soul. Conflict is more grist for the mill; the meditator does not seek conflict out, but there is a sense of security that if conflict comes, there are tools with which to make positive use of it.

These tools, however, also tend to make conflict much more rare. The practice of Sila – "Not to hurt anyone, not to harm anyone, and all of your actions should be in such a way that whatever you do it is wholesome for yourself and wholesome for others" (Participant 2) - removes many of the causes of conflict simply by instilling the principle of kindness and thoughtfulness. Other causes of conflict are intercepted by the early warning of body sensations and the ability to choose to communicate with a partner or to take care of one's self, allowing the feelings to pass through and extracting their teachings as they pass by.

When all of these tools fail and one partner is confronted by the ire of the other, Vipassana helps to replace the need for defensiveness with a sense of compassion and a deeper understanding of the nature of emotion.

If he gives me a fire, I don't give him back a fire... If we don't have this awareness, he gives me fire, I give him back fire, and then [we have] more fire. (Participant 6)

It is the nature of the mind to build more of whatever is focused upon. Meditators know from their own inner experience that fighting fire with fire only makes a bigger fire. Compassion is the cooling and calming water that douses the flames and helps a partner to regain equilibrium.

Finally, the viewpoint of Vipassana meditators is that one cannot change another, and it is therefore not helpful to try. "We can be friends but we cannot change anybody and if we expect [to change someone] then we bring suffering to ourself because even ourself we cannot change ourself easily" (Participant 6). Rather than wasting energy on the futile attempt to change a person that one finds irritating, work on the self can bring about the desired results – "...after some significant work that we've done with ourselves, we notice that, you know, that person that used to annoy you doesn't annoy you as much anymore – they're actually becoming pretty nice!" (Participant 4).

Participants in this study agreed that practice of Vipassana meditation is not a panacea, nor a cure for all ills. Practice is sometimes difficult, progress sometimes slow. Not all problems can be solved, and it is not always possible to bring full awareness to a situation – Vipassana is not proof against anger, fear, depression, or any other emotion or feeling. Participants also agreed, however, that the practice of Vipassana has brought about sweeping and positive changes in their lives. The tools of Vipassana make it so that there

will be less situations where one wants to scream and shout or to throw things or to do other major regrets [like] maybe [drinking] alcohol and getting drunk. These things are very very unlikely to happen and the more one practices properly the less likely they will come. So it will be much much more harmonious. (Participant 2)

By gradually bringing awareness to deeper and deeper parts of the mind and the body, meditators are able to gain the ability to act freely in an ever-widening range of situations, rather than being chained to slavery under the whip of their emotions and conditioned reactions. Freedom, when coupled with responsibility, brings about a greater sense of wholeness and an ability to achieve much deeper connection with self, with other people, and with the world. The emptiness that often accompanies material success in this culture is replaced by an appreciation for all things, compassion for the suffering of self and others, and the fulfillment of knowing that there is a deeper meaning and purpose for all that happens.

"I always think of going to Vipassana as a sobering experience..." one participant noted. "I've had other meditation experiences that were so blissful and wonderful but... I always feel much more normal at a Vipassana course than any other course I've gone to."

"It's much more grounded isn't it?" I asked.

"Grounded, and sort of realistic" she said, laughing. "You're right there with your pain and there's no escaping all that."

Eloquently and simply stated, this is the bane and the blessing of Vipassana meditation – one cannot escape being exactly where, how, and who they are. Bringing acceptance to this simple truth is a surprisingly difficult task, but also a decidedly rewarding one.

Implications and limitations of the research

We have now come nearly full circle with this study, having begun with the question of what can make love better, surveyed meditation theory and relationship literature, outlined study methodology and discussed the results of the interviews. Answers to the thesis question have been posed in many ways, but there may still be queries of what significance any of this may have in the

"real" world. The participants in this study, after all, are people who have put more than normal dedication into a practice of which a majority of people in the world have never heard. What can this study say to people who are not prepared to undertake the discipline and commitment necessary in the practice of Vipassana? Even for those who are willing to commit to this practice, of what moment are the findings in this study?

There are, to be sure, limitations involved in phenomenology as a method of study. Only seven people were interviewed, and it is not possible to construct statistics that are meaningful from a sample size this small; the results of this study are not ones that can be mathematically generalized to a larger population. In addition, the participants were selected from a very specialized grouping and their views about love and relationship are not likely to be in line with the views of the general North American population.

Despite these limitations, however, I believe that the results of this study have some important implications for meditators and non-meditators alike. In the first place, the analysis of the interviews showed that there are strong correlations between the experience of the meditators in relationship and the goals and ideals of relationship researchers who write about the spiritual aspects of love. Though the number of participants in the study was small, the message transmitted was one that seems to connect well with the larger experience of writers from many traditions. The strong connections between the statements of the participants and the theory discussed in the literature review suggests that participants' experience does have a grounding in a larger sphere than just that of the community of Vipassana meditators.

Secondly, the descriptions of love and relationship related by study participants correspond to an advanced level of practice of Vipassana as well as an advanced level of relationship theory. The experience of the people in this study is therefore valuable as a road map for beginning meditators and for those who wish to make their own relationships into paths of self-discovery. In both of these cases, the results of this study can be significant as landmarks along the Path, and can provide helpful insight into the experience of others who have walked ahead on a similar route.

Conclusion

Is there a commonality in what can make a relationship something of beauty and fulfillment, and are there principles to follow that can lead a person toward happiness in relationship? Is there a tool, a practice, a path that will lead surely to a sense of greater joy and intimate communion with a partner?

It has been the thesis of this study that the practice of Vipassana meditation is just such a path, leading to greater understanding of the principles of joy and peace, and it has been the purpose of this study to investigate the experience of committed meditators. It has also been a purpose of this study to set the experience of Vipassana meditation and relationship into a theoretical framework and to describe the theory and literature that defines the ground on which the experience rests. To this end, this investigation was built as a three legged stool, standing on the principles of Buddhism, the literature of relationship, and the practice of meditation.

We have seen that Buddhism emphasizes a middle way, seeking to walk a path between extremes and attempting to find peace and acceptance within a grounded sense of the reality of what is being experienced here and now. We have also seen that there are many theories of how to improve relationships and that these theories can be classified into those that use a "cookbook" approach, and those that view relationship as a path. The "cookbook" principle, when applied to relationship improvement, prescribes recipes of techniques for how partners may better relate with each other. The approach of "Path" views relationship as a journey of change and growth and bases improvement in relationship on the personal development and individual growth of each partner.

Finally, we looked briefly at the various ways in which meditation can be practiced and found that meditation techniques can be classified into the wide categories of techniques that utilize a fixed focus for concentration (such as an object, an image, or a mantra), those that use an idea, thought, or emotion, and those that utilize various aspects of the body as the focus of concentration. Vipassana falls into the category of techniques that utilize the body, and specifically focuses on the changing nature of bodily sensations as they arise and pass away.

This study has been undertaken as a phenomenology, seeking to investigate and report the experience of meditation and relationship of people who have committed themselves to the path of Vipassana. It was recognized that it is not possible to completely separate the viewpoint of the investigator from that which he or she is investigating and I have included my own thoughts and opinions occasionally. Certainly, this study is written from the viewpoint of a person who is himself a meditator and so has developed positive feelings for, and understandings of, the meaning behind the experience. Though it has been my intention to report in an unbiased way, it is also important for readers to remember that I write from the viewpoint of one who is already convinced of the benefits of Vipassana.

The findings of this study have largely born out the thesis. The testimony of the participants suggests that in their experience, Vipassana has brought about positive change in their lives and in their relationships. To these people, relationship is a path to follow for the purpose of growth, wholeness, and

purification. It is the responsibility of each partner to, in the words of Mathew "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye..." (Holy Bible, Mathew 7, 5, p. 8), and to work on one's own issues before trying to "cast out the mote..." from the eye of your partner. Meditation turns one's focus inward and it becomes clear that there is no other person on whom to blame one's pain or one's happiness. Responsibility for one's own perceptions, fulfillment, and happiness lies squarely on the shoulders of each individual, a truth that can be evaded and run away from, but that cannot be escaped indefinitely.

The experience of the meditators in this study suggests that bringing awareness to body sensations acts as an early warning system for emotional turmoil, and can help not only to better understand the nature of emotion, but also to redirect powerful energy into positive channels. The self awareness, individuation, and growth catalyzed by meditation enable relationships to be managed in a more peaceful and harmonious way. Practice of metta (loving kindness), sila (moral action and the doctrine of no harm) and attention to self as the cause of one's own suffering both supports a partner through kindness and positive intent and removes pressure to change or to be a source of fulfillment for another.

With the relief of this pressure, both partners have more freedom to develop along the path of love. Generally beginning at a level of love where attachment and passion are central, meditators tend to move towards conceptions of love in which deep and committed friendship plays the largest role, and finally to a sense of the unconditional love of agapé. Within this progression, participants voiced a growing sense of realization of the benefits of serving, and the desire for the good of the other.

A relationship, based on the principles of Vipassana and supported by the committed practice of both partners can be a very beautiful thing, but is also a proving ground or crucible in which the raw metals of the psyche are forged and molded into purer form. Life as a Vipassana meditator is an intense experience and relationship is seen first and foremost as a tool by which to better follow the path of purification. Happiness in relationship cannot be the primary goal, but must be a byproduct of commitment to the path. It is recognized by meditators that it is harmful and painful to attempt to find happiness through another person, or to seek happiness alone in a hedonistic attempt to satisfy one's own longings.

Though not everyone will find the path of Vipassana to be inviting, it seems clear that the answer to the questions posed in the introduction to this study is "Yes". There *is* a way to make relationship a thing of beauty and fulfillment, there *are* principles to follow that can lead a person toward happiness in relationship, and there *is* a tool, a path, and a practice that will lead surely to a sense of greater joy and intimate communion with a partner. The tool is Vipassana, the practice is meditation, the path is intimate commitment, and the principles are those of kindness, compassion, self-awareness, self-sufficiency, and focus on self as the cause (and the point of cure) of one's own difficulties.

These are radical ideas; they are concepts that are at odds with many highly cherished ideals of love in Western society, and living them is not something that is easily won. Living in a Vipassana relationship means questioning the values with which one was raised, re-evaluating what seems to be truth, and investigating the deeper answers to questions like "Why am I here?", "What is life and relationship about?", and "How can I live in this world with greater skill, greater peace, and greater harmony?". Answering these questions can change the way the world looks, and the way it seems to work. In the words of one meditator, "I'm here to serve you, you know, Wow – what a totally different outlook on why we're here."

Appendix A: Introductory Message

Hello!

I spoke with you briefly on the last day of the Vipassana old student's course in August about my plan to conduct a thesis study about the meaning and experience of intimate relationship and how this may be influenced by Vipassana meditation.

At the time that we spoke, my ideas about the study were in their infancy and I had not yet received permission to go ahead with it from my advisors. However, time has passed in the way that it seems went to do and I'm now much nearer to being able to actually conduct interviews. With this in mind, I am writing to tell you my plans and to see if you are willing or able to take part in the study.

The title for my thesis (at least at the moment) is: "The Dhamma Path Through Relationship: Experience of Vipassana Meditators With Respect to Intimate Relationship"

and the central question (again in its most recent rendition) is: "Does practicing Vipassana enhance the experience of an intimate relationship?"

With respect to this, I will be carrying out a qualitative study, based on phenomenological methodology, and interviewing four to six people about their experience of intimate relationship. This means that I will be asking mostly open-ended questions, and will be attempting to get an idea of what each person's experience of relationship is like and how it is colored by Vipassana practice. Interviews will be conducted by telephone and will be between 30 and 60 minutes in length. Interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. (tapes and transcriptions will be labeled anonymously to protect confidentiality). There will

also be a short email or snail mail interview questionnaire to collect demographic information.

All responses and information given will remain completely anonymous, and no names will be used in the thesis report. As well, I will do my best to remove any references or quotations used in the analysis from context that could possibly identify the speaker.

The "qualifications" that I am looking for in the people that I will be interviewing are the following:

- 1) You have been a Vipassana meditator for a minimum of two years
- 2) You have attended a minimum of four courses of 8 to 10 days each
- 3) You are currently in a committed relationship, and this relationship has lasted for at least one year
- 4) You maintain a daily practice of Vipassana meditation. (This practice may not be the full two hours per day commitment suggested at the courses. The intent of this requirement is that Vipassana is a daily part of your life, that you practice it most days, and that it has become an important part of your way of being on a day to day basis)

If both partners in a relationship fit these requirements, it would be great to be able to interview both. However, due to difficulties with distance, interviews will take place individually and over the telephone.

If you fit these conditions, and are willing (or possibly willing) to take part in the study, please let me know by replying to this email. If you are interested but would like more information, please let me know and I will do my best to answer your questions. Finally, indicating interest at this point does not obligate you in any way to continue. Participation is fully voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential.

Participation in this study will take approximately one hour of your time. Interviews will be held starting in mid to late January, 2003 and finishing (hopefully) by Mid. February.

Thank you very much for your time in reading this letter. I'm looking forward to hearing back from you.

with metta,

Todd Blattner

Appendix B: Consent Form

Project Title: The Dhamma Path Through
Relationship: Experience of Vipassana Meditators
With Respect to Intimate Relationship

Researcher: Todd Blattner

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Goddard College

123 Pitkin Road

Plainfield, Vermont 05667

Phone: 802-454-8211

Thank you for volunteering to participate in a study of Vipassana and relationship. Your signature on this consent form shows that you have been informed about the conditions, risks, and safeguards of this project.

1. Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty.
2. There is no more than minimal risk to individuals who participate in this research, and anonymity is ensured. Your comments will be entered on a computer, names will be removed from interview forms, and any identifying information will be removed from the written parts of this project. Only the research supervisors and the researcher will have access to the transcript or raw data.
3. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. All raw data will be rendered anonymous, protected and archived at the Goddard College Library.
4. No risks have been identified in this study. However, questions about risk to you because of participation in this study may be addressed to the researcher or research supervisors at the phone numbers or email addresses listed at the top of this document.

5. You have my deep appreciation for participation in this study. I believe that the study will increase the level of understanding of the benefits of the practice of Vipassana.

I have read the information provided and agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix C: Preliminary Questionnaire

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study of Vipassana and relationship. Interviews for this study will take place in two parts – an email questionnaire and a telephone interview.

The email questionnaire, found below, is a series of questions with reasonably short and straight-forward answers that will help me to narrow down the external factors and variables that may influence results from the study. The telephone interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes and will be structured around open-ended questions about your experience of relationship. All information provided by you in both the email questionnaire and the telephone interview will be kept completely anonymous, as outlined in the consent form that was mailed to you earlier.

Please reply to this message including the message text in your reply, and type your answers to the questions below.

Thank you again for your participation!

Please answer the following questions:

1. How old are you?
2. How old is your partner?
3. How long have you been in relationship with your partner?
4. How long have you practiced Vipassana?
5. How many 8 or 10 day Vipassana courses have you attended?
6. Please list other courses that you have attended:
7. Did you practice Vipassana before you began your relationship? For how long?

8. Does your partner also practice Vipassana? For how long?
9. Are you presently employed?
10. If so, what is your occupation?
11. Which income level best fits your household: \$10,000 to \$19,000; \$20,000 to \$29,000; \$30,000 to \$39,000; \$40,000 to \$59,000; \$60,000 to \$100,000; over \$100,000
12. Which statement best describes your current level of education: Secondary School, Bachelor degree, Master's degree, PHD., Other
13. Do you have a child/children currently living at your home? If so, how many?
14. What is your cultural background?
15. What is your nationality?
16. What is your present city of residence?
17. What (if any) is your religious affiliation?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

As a preface to these questions, it is understood that the goal of Vipassana meditation is not to improve intimate relationship but to achieve freedom from suffering. Vipassana is expressly **not** about a search for particular desires, sensations, or ways of being. However, there are by-products of "right practice", and it is the purpose of this study to examine the experience of some of these by-products. The questions in this part of the interview will focus on your experience of relationship and the ways in which your practice of Vipassana plays a part in this experience.

1. What, in your opinion, is the meaning, or purpose, of relationship?
2. If you have had previous experience of relationship without the influence of Vipassana meditation practice, please describe what (if anything) is different in your experience of your current and past relationships.
3. How does practicing Vipassana affect your understanding of who you are and what you bring to your relationship?
4. How has practicing Vipassana affected the way you resolve conflict with your partner?
5. How has practicing Vipassana influenced your experience of love with your partner? In your experience, what does it mean to "Love" your partner?
6. Does practicing Vipassana affect the way that you perceive your partner? If so, how?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

Appendix E: Email to Participants

Dear _____,

Hello again! I hope that this letter finds you well, and that you were able to have a pleasant holiday season this year.

I am writing to follow up on my earlier email message to you about interviewing you for my thesis project with Goddard College. I have completed the initial stages of my project, everything has been given the go-ahead by my advisors, and I'm ready to start the interviews. This is a bit of a relief, as it has seemed like a bit of a lengthy process already! :-0)

At any rate, I am writing to see if you are still willing to be interviewed about your experience of Vipassana with respect to your relationship with your partner.

If so, there are a couple of steps that I would like to ask you to complete:

1) Read the consent form that is attached to this message. If it looks OK to you, please print it out, sign it, and mail it back to me at:

Todd Blattner

Box 2535

Vanderhoof BC

V0J 3A0

or fax it to me at: (250) 567 3943

(My phone numbers, if you need them, are: (250) 567 6708 at home, and (250) 567 4413 ext 2241 at work)

If you are not able to print the form, or would like me to send a copy to you, please send me your mailing address and I would be happy to send it to you with a stamped return envelope.

2) Decide on a time that I can call you for an interview. (Interviews will take between 30 and 60 minutes)

I would like to start interviews in the week of January 14 if at all possible. Between January 14 and Feb. 11 I would be able to call Tuesday or Friday evenings any time after 5:00 PM (possibly earlier if necessary), any weekday morning at 7:00 or 7:30 AM, and any time on Saturday and Sunday. I can also possibly arrange other times to fit your schedule if necessary.

3) Answer the demographic questionnaire that is pasted to the bottom of this message.

To answer the questionnaire, please just reply to this message (including the original text), and then type in your answers to the questions. Again, if you would prefer to have a paper copy of the questionnaire, please let me know and I will mail one to you.

(The demographic information is for statistical purposes only, and any identifying information will be removed from the questionnaires. If there are questions that you would prefer not to answer, please just leave them blank).

4) (Optional) I have also attached the interview questions to this document so that you can preview them if you would like to. I would ask, however, that you not discuss your thoughts about the answers with anyone until after the interview. This is because the study is intended to record your individual ideas, impressions, and experience and if you discuss your answers beforehand it may be more difficult to separate your own ideas and experience from the shared ideas and experience of the discussion.

I really appreciate your willingness to be involved with this project - thank you very much for your time and participation!!

I'm looking forward to hearing from you,

with metta,

Todd

Preliminary Questionnaire

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study of Vipassana and relationship. Interviews for this study will take place in two parts – an email questionnaire and a telephone interview.

The email questionnaire, found below, is a series of questions with reasonably short and straight-forward answers that will help me to narrow down the external factors and variables that may influence results from the study. The telephone interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes and will be structured around open-ended questions about your experience of relationship. All information provided

by you in both the email questionnaire and the telephone interview will be kept completely anonymous, as outlined in the consent form that is included with this message.

Please reply to this message including the message text in your reply, and type your answers to the questions below.

Thank you again for your participation!

Please answer the following questions:

1. How old are you?
2. How old is your partner?
3. How long have you been in relationship with your partner?
4. How long have you practiced Vipassana?
5. How many 8 or 10 day Vipassana courses have you attended?
6. Please list other courses that you have attended:
7. Did you practice Vipassana before you began your relationship? For how long?
8. Does your partner also practice Vipassana? For how long?
9. Are you presently employed?
10. If so, what is your occupation?
11. Which income level best fits your household: \$10,000 to \$19,000; \$20,000 to \$29,000; \$30,000 to \$39,000; \$40,000 to \$59,000; \$60,000 to \$100,000; over \$100,000
12. Which statement best describes your current level of education: Secondary School, Bachelor degree, Master's degree, PHD., Other
13. Do you have a child/children currently living at your home? If so, how many?
14. What is your cultural background?
15. What is your nationality?
16. What is your present city of residence?

17. What (if any) is your religious affiliation?

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End Notes

1 In practice, many people do follow Buddhism as a religion. However, this is not the original teaching of the Buddha, who said "You should do your work, for the Tathagatas only teach the way" (Rahula, 1974, p. 1). Though there are many "rules" in the Buddhist thought system, the intent behind them is not that they are

edicts, but that they are guides to a path that may be followed by choice, as it is found to be worthy.

The Buddha also taught that one should always question, and always be open to other faiths and ideas. If a thing is deemed wholesome and good, this thing should be accepted and if not then it should be cast aside. This is true of "even the Tathagata (Buddha) himself, so that he (the disciple) might be fully convinced of the true value of the teacher whom he followed" (Vimamsaka-sutta, as cited in (Rahula, 1974, p. 3).

2 In this case, the unpleasant sensation of hunger may be connected with a pleasant sensation of the thought of eating the apple to make the hunger go away, or the pleasant sensation of actually eating the apple if one is able to obtain it.

3 "From lust arises grief; from lust arises fear. For him who is free from lust there is no grief, much less fear" (Rahula, 1974, p. 131).

4. In Flatland, only that which can be empirically investigated by "...the human senses and their extensions (telescopes, microscopes, photographic plates, etc.)" is considered to be real [Wilber, 2000, p. 70). Wilber describes a circle containing four quadrants that together make up the full spectrum of experience. On the right hand side of this circle are quadrants that contain the internal/subjective experience of the world on both an individual and a social scale, represented by the pronouns "I" and "We", and by hierarchies of *quality*. On the left hand side of the circle are quadrants that represent the objective and behavioral side of existence on the individual (It) and social (Its) scale. Balancing the levels of internal and subjective qualities from the left hand side of the circle, the right hand side of the circle is concerned with hierarchies of quantity, where what can be counted is given most importance. This circle is also seen to exist on many levels of development from simple matter to body, mind, persona, ego, centaur, soul and spirit (Wilber, 2000, p. 103). Where behavioral psychology concerns itself with only the objective side of the circle, and with mainly the levels of matter, body, persona, and perhaps ego, Buddhism also investigates the subjective side of the circle and carries the investigation into realms of spirit and beyond.

5. Buddhist monks may be ordained for a relatively short time, and then return to the householder's life. It is the custom in Thailand, in fact, for nearly all young men to be ordained as a monk for a short time.

6. A mantra is a word, sound, or set of syllables repeated over and over either vocally (as in the chant "Om mani padmi hum), or silently in the mind.

7. It is interesting to note here that the word "Amen" used at the end of Christian prayers is very similar in sound to the first syllables of the Hindu mantra "OM

mani padmi hum". Prayer is a particular form of meditation, one with deep roots in the Christian community, and especially within the monastic tradition. In the words of Thomas Merton, speaking of the monastic goal of oneness with God: "Monastic solitude, poverty, obedience, silence and prayer dispose the soul for this mysterious destiny in God" (Merton, 1957, p. 3).

8. A mudra is a particular hand position entered and held with a state of high awareness. Mudras can be extremely detailed and are a way of focusing attention on minute details of hand position. This focus functions in the treble purpose of concentrating the mind, gaining insight into one's own body sensations, and obtaining the qualities that are represented by the mudra. "When the ten fingers come together, it represents the ten dharma realms. From the little finger to the thumb, each represents earth, water, fire, wind, and space respectively" (Sheng, nd).

9. Though the three categories of "body", "soul", and "transcendence" are arranged in a hierarchical fashion, "At the terminal point of each path, one can fall into the prior Suchness of all realms, (Nirvana) ...although this is both easier and more likely the higher the path one initially adopts" (Wilber, 1996, p. 113).

10. Self awareness, self-discipline, and deep understanding are not seen to be the prerogative of Buddhism, and Vipassana is not seen to be only effective in walking the path of the Buddha. The qualities developed by Vipassana meditation practice are equally applicable to any religious belief or path.

11. The development of equanimity is a central part of Vipassana practice, and should be stressed as such. Thomas Merton provides a very good description of equanimity in the Christian tradition saying that if

"...we find that we are unwilling or unable to give up some particular practice or observance for the sake of some other worthy and necessary task, and if we find that when we cannot keep to our plan of observance we are sad, angry, indignant, or otherwise disturbed, it means that we are seeking these things for their own sakes and that we are therefore losing sight of our true objective which is purity of heart. For in this case the practices we follow are not purifying our heart of its selfish passions, but strengthening those very passions in our soul" (Merton, 1957, p. 11).

12. "Anicca: impermanent, ephemeral, changing" (Goenka, 1987 , p. 114). Along with Dukkha (suffering) anicca is one of the two basic characteristics of all phenomena residing in time and space, and denotes the fact that all things within the sphere of time will, do, and must change.

13. Though fictional, the character of Don Quixote (Lovell, 2000] provides a good example of this search when he goes out into the world in search of great

adventures and acts of heroism to perform for his Lady Dulcinea, calling on her as if to a Goddess in his times of trial or need.

14. The concept of "differentiation" comes from the theoretical framework for relationship formulated by Murray Bowen. Part of this theory states that "Individuals vary in their ability to adapt – that is, to cope with the demands of life and to reach their goals" (Gilbert, 1992, p. 18). An individual's state of differentiation is determined by his or her ability to operate as an independent and intrinsically motivated self, independent of others.

15. In a business type relationship, a potential partner is evaluated in a business sense, with an outlook toward economic considerations, social status, and suitability as a business partner (Sternberg, 1998, p. 152).

16. In a sacrifice relationship, one individual makes consistent sacrifices for the benefit of the other and "...is not really happy unless he or she is primarily in the role of giver rather than taker" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 55).

17. "In a garden story, the relationship is viewed as a garden that needs continually to be nurtured and otherwise cared for" (Sternberg, 1998, p. 147).

18. As discussed in an earlier section, the Eight-Fold Noble Path is an aspect of "Magga", the noble truth that describes how to work with and eventually move beyond the realities of Dukkha. It includes the advice to cultivate wise action, speech, attention, and understanding – principles that expand into a practice of peacefulness, acceptance, and powerful responsibility for one's own choices.

19. Romantic love, it must be noted, does not always end up in disillusionment. Romantic love can be (and often is) an important first step along the path of love between two people. However, if the partnership is to last, romantic love must be replaced by more mature forms of love relatively quickly.

20. Natural sciences in this case denotes physics, chemistry, biology, etc. and natural scientific methodology denotes the way in which investigation is carried out in these sciences.

21. I need to qualify what I mean when I talk of "self" with respect to Buddhism. Strictly speaking, the "self" is seen in Buddhist teaching as a non-entity – something that does not actually exist. However, the non-existence of self is something that is only realized at quite a high level of awareness, and in practical terms for the vast majority of people a "self" is a necessary mental construct for the purposes of surviving in the world. An analogy to help visualize this is to realize that physicists know without doubt that what we generally take to be solid matter is actually made up mostly of space, populated with billions of tiny bits of matter and energy called atoms all bouncing and careening about. In reality,

there is no such thing as "solid matter". However, knowing this does not mean that it won't hurt to bang one's head against the wall.

22. Procedural steps have been synthesized from the following references:
(Valle, 1978) and (Creswell, 1998)

23. See Appendix A

24. See Appendix B

25. See Appendix C